THE SHIELD G-MAN CLUB FANZINE

ISSUE 4
April 2020

This Issue:
Imaginary Covers!
and Mighty Commissions

THE SHIELD G-MAN CLUB FANZINE

Volume 1, Number 4 April 2020

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Rik Offenberger Editor-in-Chief
Jim Burrows Editor & Production
Earl Wajenberg, Copy Editor
Jon Singer, Copy Editor
Ron Krueger, Copy Editor
Chris Squires, Proof Reader

Cover art by Jay Piscopo

The Shield G-Man Club Fanzine
Published occasionally by
G-Man Comics.
12973 Saddleback Place,
Chino CA 91710.

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Printed in the U.S.A. by Ka-Blam

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Lancelot Strong both as the Shield and that was exciting and the same day, I bought the Fly #1 and I was totally hooked. The front page gave the readers the history of characters and that was fun, too.

COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE

Gustave Dore's first book was a comic book — in 1847

(See Page 1)

#958 March 27, 1992 $2.50 United States

Valentino defends Image

Who's producing what, when, and why

By Rik Offenberger

"What have you heard about Image Comics? Was the article in *Comics Buyer's Guide* accurate? Just who is involved, what will they be doing, and will it mean the end of the world as we know it? It's time to end the rumors and hear the truth. Attend the CCD Jim Valentino meeting: Tuesday evening, February 25th, 1992, 7:30 p.m. Retailers only."

After a build-up like that, how could anyone *not* attend the meeting at Capital City Distribution's Commerce, Calif., warehouse? I went with two of my employees to represent my store, Paper Hero Comics. Jim Valentino, as one of the original founders of Image, answered questions for two hours. The following is information that is pertinent to both retailers and consumers.

• Who is involved in Image Press?

"Image was the best-kept secret in the comics industry. We have been working on it (VALENTINO, Page 28)

"Todd McFarlane left *Spider-Man* almost a year ago. Rob Liefeld was asked by Marvel to stop pencilling *X-Force* with issue #9 and to stop plotting with issue #12. Jim Lee is leaving *X-Men* with issue #11. Marc Silvestri is leaving *Wolverine*; the issue number is undetermined. Erik Larsen is leaving Marvel at the end of *Spider-Man* #22."

THIS ISSUE WAS MAILED MARCH 17, 1992

Jim Valentino

***SGMC**: You've been involved with comics both as a fan and as a pro. How did you go from one to the other?*

Rik: I was a comic book retailer and one of the ways I wanted to promote my store was through journalism. I contacted the Comic Buyers Guide by telephone and applied for a freelance job with Don Thompson. I had contacts at Marvel through the Diamond retailers summits and Ken Krugger at Capital Comics Distribution. I knew Jim Valentino before Image Comics launched, so I covered the Image launch for the CBG, and other things I could think of. As a freelancer, I had to find my own stories. I also wrote for their sister publication, the short-lived Comic Retailer.

I was on the internet very early. I started writing for Silver Bullet Comicbooks, Newsarama and Comic Book Resources. As a journalist, I had contact with Michael Silberkleit, one of the owners of Archie Comics. I did a story about his father and later I interviewed Michael about his own story. When there was an opening at Archie Comics. I called Michael and said I wanted the job. We talked for about 15 minutes over the phone and he gave me the job. I was at Archie Comics for 10 years.

***SGMC**: Presumably, starting out as a fan helped you on the pro side. Did your fannish tastes, preferences, biases ever hold you back, though?*

Rik: Michael was very supportive of ideas and I always kept in mind that everything I did at Archie needs to generate enough income to justify my salary. But I wasn't in a creative position, so I looked for new ways to promote their product and worked with various sources to get better coverage for Archie. The more Michael read about Archie Comics online, the happier he was. But I had no editorial input, so my tastes didn't come into play.

***SGMC**: The Agent Shield covers and stories are a major project. What motivated you to take it on?*

Rik: Kevin Moorhead. He had done a series of cover commissions telling the stories of the Mighty Crusaders after the series was canceled. There were no comics, just covers with a solicitation-like text blurb about the plot of the story that went with the cover. I just copied his idea.

***SGMC**: Which comes first for Agent Shield? The art? The storyline? The arc/event?*

Rik: The concept was just a thought. I didn't like what they were doing with Joe Higgins since the Golden Age. Joe Higgins was an FBI Agent at a time when G-Men were heroes by themselves. On top of that he was a superhero. When they updated him in the Silver Age, Private Strong was a soldier and Bill Higgins was a guy who couldn't keep a job. At DC, Joe Higgins was the soldier and when he came back to Archie, Joe became a bureaucrat at MLJ. I thought Archie really dropped the ball on an exciting civilian identity, and also originally Joe Higgins made himself a hero through his own determina-

tion, like Batman. After the Golden Age, he was no longer active in his own origin. So I wanted to bring him back to his roots My version would be an FBI Agent, hence the name Agent Shield. As a tribute to Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, I named him Simon N. Kirby. I drew him to look like the Wally West, all-red version of the Flash and added a physical shield to the costume. I met Mitch Kwok online and we started on a project of 100 Agent Shield covers. The original plan was to have him with two MLJ characters as a team-up book. Not every cover was a team-up, but that was the original plan.

***SGMC**: How do you decide what other creators' characters to cross over with Agent Shield?*

Rik: We started with just the MLJ heroes, but later we included original heroes by creators who were members of the Shield G-Man Club.

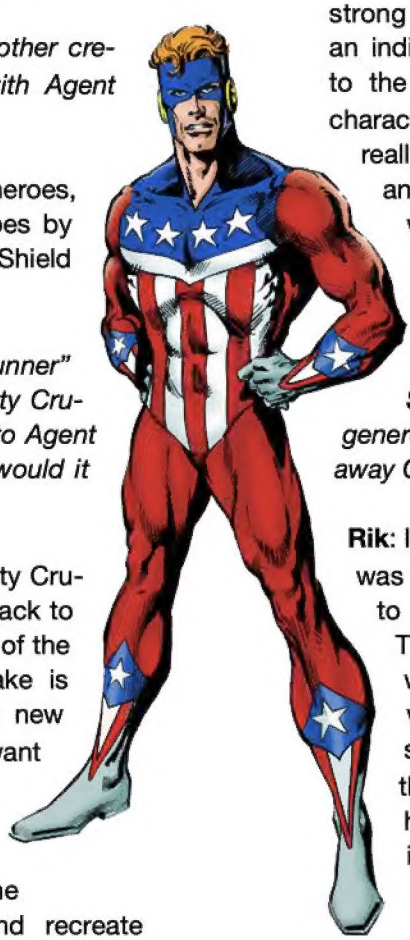
***SGMC**: If you could be the "showrunner" for the next generation of the Mighty Crusader comics, how would it relate to Agent Shield, his story and world? How would it differ?*

Rik: If I were in charge of the Mighty Crusaders revival, I would take them back to their Golden Age roots. I think one of the biggest errors that publishers make is that the fans aren't looking for a new hero with classic names. They want their heroes. That's why all the replacement heroes at Marvel failed. Every time they revive the MLJ Heroes, they try and do it the Julie Schwartz/Stan Lee way and recreate everything. What they don't understand is that there were no fans left when Julie Schwartz and Stan Lee did their revival. There wasn't a group of Jay Garrett fans disappointed with Barry Allen. Likewise, there weren't a lot of Plastic Man fans unhappy with Mr. Fantastic because no one collected comics back then. They were developing new fans.

These days, the fans know the properties and want the original versions, so you can't take away Joe Higgins and give them Victoria Adams instead and wonder why the fans of Joe Higgins aren't excited. I wouldn't want to bring Agent Shield to a revival, I would want to give the fans the heroes they want, and hire writers that were excited to tell stories with them instead of trying to create a different universe.

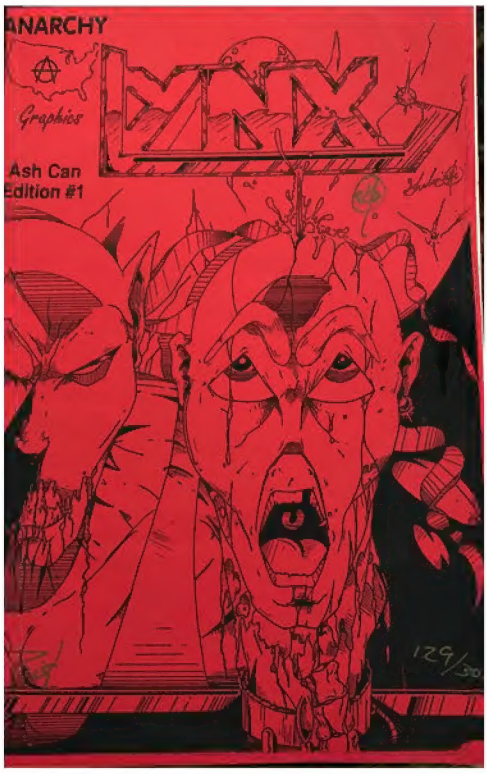
***SGMC**: Who are your favorite MLJ/ Archie characters? In general and as a specific interpretation?*

Rik: In truth, I like them all. I have strong patriotic feelings as an individual, and that draws me to the Shield. The Fly is a great character. The Black Hood works really well in a lot of different genres and has some fun stories. The Fox wasn't my favorite until the Dean Haspiel mini-series. Dean proved that it just takes a creator that cares about their history to make them fun.



***SGMC**: The Shield G-Man Club stands out for its generosity. What made you get the ball rolling by giving away G-Man kits?*

Rik: I wanted to be a member of the G-Man Club, and it was too late to join the 40s version. No one was going to do it for me, so I had to create the club myself. The plan was to reproduce the old card and badge, which we did the first year. Everything else is done with the generosity of the club members like yourself, who have devoted time and energy to make things to give away to fellow fans. We wouldn't have this very magazine if it wasn't for you donating your time and skills to help bring it to life for all the other members. I am proud that so many people want to be part of this shared experience.



***SGMC**: So, do you have any non-homage/pastiche characters prowling around in your head waiting to tell their stories?*

Rik: There is a character called Lynx that I created 30 years ago and was planning on publishing. It has some great art from Justin Vargas. When I was a retailer, I gave it away a page at a time as the work progressed. I published an ashcan version but never did the full comic. Who knows, someday I may finish it.

***SGMC**: Alternatively, is there an homage other than Agent Shield that you're itching to do?*

Rik: Agent Shield is the way I think they should have done the Shield. I also have Sgt. Flag who is a parody character who's name is an homage to Captain Flag. MLJ had two patriotic characters, so I wanted two for the club. While Agent Shield is my idealized version of the Shield, Sgt. Flag is all about Rob Liefled and Todd McFarlane from the 90s. Sgt. Flag is all the action and adrenaline of Stalone and Swartzeneger that Rob and Todd tapped into, with all the trope that goes with that time period. His costume is asymmetrical; he has swords and guns; he has extra pouches and he kicks ass. Beyond those two, I would rather work on something original.

***SGMC**: What with the Mighty Crusaders Network, First Comic News, Agent Shield, the Shield G-Man Club, and the MLJ Companion, you've done a lot of fandom-based work. Do you have any recommendations for other fans?*

Rik: If you do all of this stuff for yourself, other people will join you and support you. The Mighty Crusaders Network started as a Geocities website for Lancelot Strong. Bradley Cobb gave me his site MightyMLJ and Scott Martin gave me his site the Crusaders Chronicles and the Mighty Crusaders Message Board. I combined all of them to make a network of all three sites and that was the Mighty Crusaders Network.

The MLJ Companion is an outgrowth of the Mighty Crusaders Network—the website turned into a book.

First Comics News was my business plan to take over Steve Conley's *Pulse*. I was offered the job but not the pay structure I wanted, so I converted my Yahoo, Super Hero News into First Comics News using my Pulse business plan. It's exactly the site I had hoped for and it only survives because other people join in to support indie comics.

The Shield G-Man Club only exists because all of you joined.

My recommendation: "If you build it they will come". If you're having enough fun, other people will join you to have fun too.

Kevin Moorhead talks about comic art commissions

by Rik Offenberger

I discovered Kevin Moorhead's cover collection of MLJ Charters mashed up with the Avengers. Then I noticed he had a series of Mighty Crusader comics covers that continue with plots that pick up from where Archie stopped publishing them. They were beautiful covers and you couldn't miss Kevin's enthusiasm for these heroes. Kevin was nice enough to sit down with us and fill us in on his fandom as well as how and why he collects commissioned art.

Shield G-Man Club: *How old were you when you discovered comics?*

Kevin Moorhead: I'm not 100% sure. I remember my aunt buying me some comics when I was "young" at the local meat market. And I know I came across some Whitman DC reprints back in the day too. I definitely remember being at the Giant, the big local grocery chain, and thumbing through the copy of Ghost Rider 27 they had on the stands. That came out in Dec of 1977.

SGMC: *What attracted you to them?*

Kevin: I would guess it'd be the visceral nature of comics. The colors, the Kirby-inspired action art, the cowboys as superheroes aspect and then you throw in the cosmic stuff Marvel had. Byrne's Galactus vs the Sphinx has had a lasting impression on me.

SGMC: *Did your parents encourage your hobby?*

Kevin: Not actively. They were fine with letting me "find my own way".

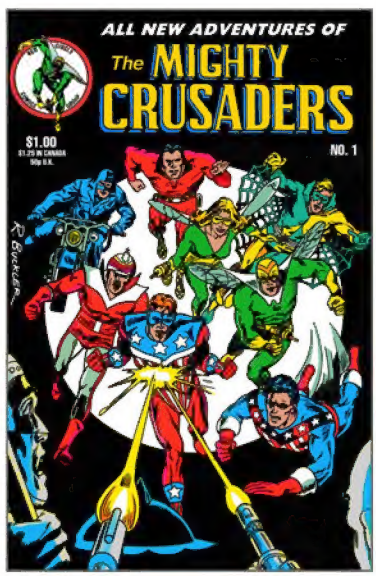
SGMC: *When did you discover the Mighty Crusaders?*

Kevin: In the 80s. I went to our local comic shop, Fat Cats, and right there on the shelf with Avengers and Justice League was the Mighty Crusaders #1. In retrospect, I remember reading about some of them in Jeff Rovin's Encyclopedia of Super-Heroes, but my first conscious memory was that trip to the comic shop.

SGMC: *What made you connect with the Crusaders?*

Kevin: At first, it was the newness of it. Finding something that I'd never heard of before that looked really cool. Buckler's art was great on the series. The little geeky bits like the half page origin pieces in the back and the preview of Mister Midnight. As the song goes, "a whole new world …"

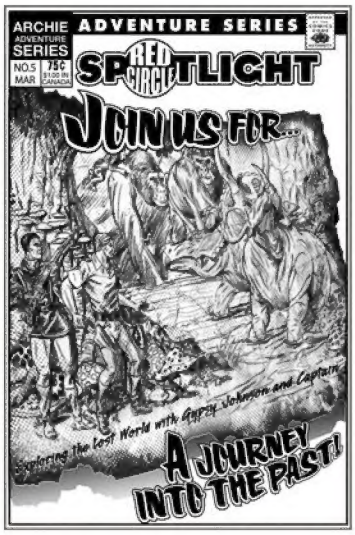
SGMC: *Who is your favorite?*



Kevin: That's a hard one. I doubt I had one back in the 80s. They were more an amorphous blob of a group. Also, only the first 3, maybe 4, issues came out where I lived. So I only had a limited bit of exposure. None of the other titles made it to my neck of the woods either so it was very limited. Now, when I look at MLJ world, I'd have to say the Lancelot Strong Shield because of my love of almost all things Kirby.

SGMC: *When did you start collecting commissions?*

Kevin: It was about 2008. I'd had blank walls in the apartment for a number of years and nothing I ever saw really made me want to hang it. No sunsets, no waterfalls, no space-scapes or posters. I just didn't see anything that I'd want on my walls. Then I realized I could get someone like John Byrne or George Perez to draw something just for me. At that point I knew what I wanted on my walls.



SGMC: *How do you choose an artist for a commission?*

Kevin: I see it as a two stage thing. First, is the idea important enough for me to go to higher priced artists or is it more something I like but could live with a lesser known artist doing the work. Then it's the matter of trying to find the right style. Anthony Summey's cover to Red Circle Spotlight #5 is a good example. Summey's work comes out of that old school adventure serial world, so I thought he'd be the right choice to give me an Indiana Jones style cover. And I think he did a great job with it.

SGMC: *How do you get in touch with the artist you want?*

Kevin: Oh, it's changed so much. Social media wasn't what it is today and so back in 2008(ish) when I started, it often was a matter of going on some kind of digital expedition to find folks. I'd get excited just finding an e-mail address on some random page that let me get in touch with someone. Later on, CAF, DeviantArt and then Facebook made things a lot easier.

SGMC: *Most of your commissions are crossovers or imaginary covers, how do you choose?*

Kevin: Personally, I'm just not really interested in getting an artist drawing a single, specific character. To me it's that I have that already in the comics. The commissions grew out of wanting something more "unique". Mixing up characters from different genres or companies made the commission worth it to me. That developed into an outlet for my failed comic book "writerness".

SGMC: *Are you trying to tell a story or storyline with the cover?*

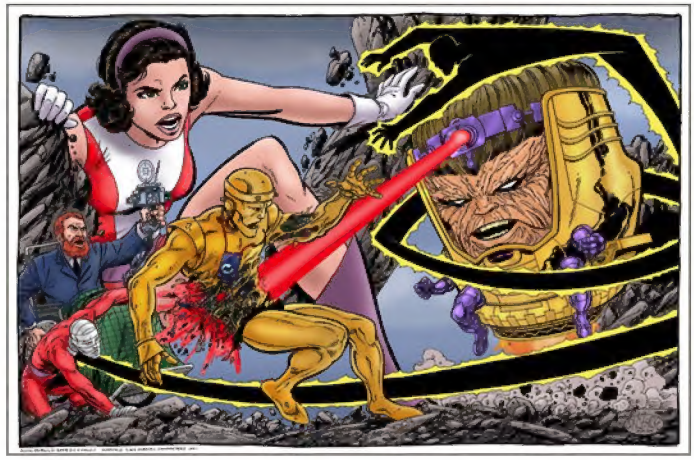
Kevin: Not really. Or, at least, not really when it comes to the Crusaders. I knew going in I would take the time to write up the issue blurbs so there wasn't a sense that I had to capture the entire issue's plot.

SGMC: *The Mighty Crusaders have a lot of uniform variation in each hero. What elements are important to you?*

Kevin: My honest answer would probably be to say not much is important. I didn't want to just rehash things with the continuing cover series but instead to continue the stories right from where things left off in the 80s. Just as if I were the line editor back then. And that meant developing the characters and that leads to change—to the line up and to the look. So while the Shield's trunks were more for me about an easy way to differentiate the golden age Shield from the 60s version, I had no problem changing the Comet's costume. In that case it was nabbing the look from the late 80s promotional piece Archie did.

SGMC: You have hundreds of pieces of original art. What do you do with all of them?

Kevin: Some are permanently on the walls (the John Byrne Doom Patrol piece) while others I swap out everyone once in a while. I don't really have much else



on the walls save a calendar or two, so this is the main form of decoration I have.

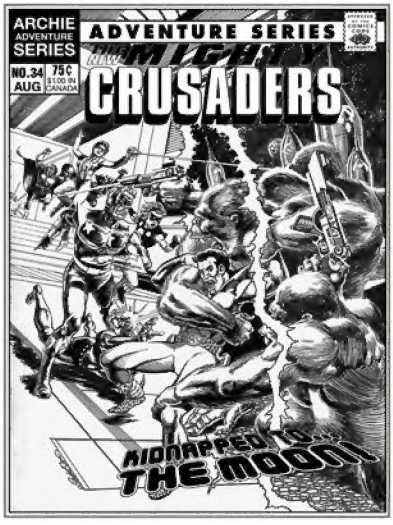
SGMC: *When did you decide to share them on Comic-ArtFans.com?*

Kevin: It was… end of 2008. That was really the only real site that I knew of that was geared really for fans to show off their stuff.

SGMC: *How do you decide on a character for that artist?*

Kevin: It's more the opposite. Coming up with the combination or plot idea for an issue and then thinking about who could best capture the feel for it.

SGMC: *When you are doing a series of covers, like the Mighty Crusaders cover run, do you like to stick to the same artist throughout the run?*



Kevin: At first I did. I wasn't really thinking long term. I had a set of stories/issues in mind and was able to work out a bulk deal price with the artists I had in mind. Once I decided to do these as an ongoing thing, I went looking for artists based on their style. Looking to match their work with the tone of the story. Andy Fish doing the art for the cover about a haunted castle is a perfect example.

SGMC: *You have one artist pencil, another ink, and a third color. How do you choose each of them?*

Kevin: It depends. Often times, it's simply a given that the artist will ink their own work. Getting someone else to ink the pencils isn't something I plan for. When it comes to coloring, while I went looking for various colorists early on, at this point I've found that Chris Ivy gives me what I want every time and can do the lettering work too. So I tend to do most of that work through him these days.

SGMC: *What is the price range for each of these categories if you don't mind sharing?*

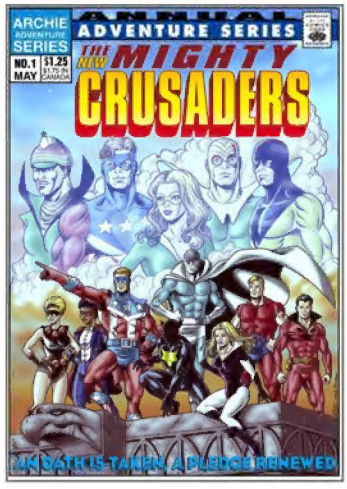
Kevin: I would respectfully pass on talking dollars beyond saying that I have been very lucky, almost blessed, to have had the kind of job that allowed me to have the extra money to be involved in commissions. But it certainly depends on what I have in mind. John Byrne was expensive but worth it. Though I would never have gone to him to draw the *Super-Adaptoid vs. Amazo* that I have. How much I'm willing to spend depends on the subject.

SGMC: *How much of the final version is your vision and how much is the artist's inspiration?*

Kevin: It varies. If I feel that I know what I want, I don't think it bad, or wrong, to ask the artist for something that specific. It's certainly okay for them to just say no. Often, I'll offer some kind of layout idea and they'll run with it from there.

SGMC: *What advice can you give someone interested in starting to collect commissions?*

Kevin: At this point, the number one thing I can say is, take the time to look into the artist you're thinking of commissioning. I've been lucky in that I've had very few bad experiences, but those that were, were bad. Some artists have been amazing to work with while others involved me contacting a lawyer. Making sure that the person will deliver ought to be the starting point. Not the most exciting part of the process but it's important.



Also, take some time to think about who you want to approach. Not everything needs to be drawn by George Perez, Alan Davis or Ivan Reis. And if you know exactly what you want, then I'd say be honest with the artist about it. Do it respectfully, certainly. Though some of the pieces I have that are the least favorite are so because they didn't draw what I had in mind.

Retroactively Reno: The Reno Maniquis Project

by Rik Offenberger

Reno Maniquis has a Retro Cover Project which picks up where different series have ended, and he presents a cover for an alternative story. I was a fan of his work, but we really never had a chance to speak before, so I was looking forward to hearing his story.

Reno Maniquis

***Shield G-Man Club**: When did you discover comics?*

Reno Maniquis: I don't recall the exact age or moment, but I'm guessing around when I was four or five years old. A local book store reprinted a lot of DC and Marvel comics from that era, and those were the ones my parents bought for me as a kid. I gravitated more towards DC, since during that time they had more done-in-one stories and Marvel had multi-chapter ones spread out over several issues. Since the local reprints weren't published monthly or with any regularity, it was easier to follow the done-in-one comics.

***SGMC**: Were your parents supportive of your reading comics?*

Reno: Oh, yes. They were both writers and avid readers, so they encouraged their kids to read, too. They were also very supportive of me wanting to be an artist. In fact, two of my siblings are also artists by profession.

***SGMC**: Which comics were your favorites?*

Reno: Superman and Batman were my favorites back then, along with the Flash. On the Marvel side, Spider-Man.

***SGMC**: When did you discover the Mighty Crusaders?*

Reno: I discovered the MLJ Heroes via the Red Circle revival during the 1980s. Some local bookstores began importing a ton of back issues and selling them at cheaper prices than local comics stores, and browsing through them I discovered the Red Circle line of comics.

***SGMC**: What attracted you to them?*

Reno: The discovery of "new" heroes that weren't DC or Marvel intrigued me as a kid. During the 1970s, I only knew about Superman, Batman, Spider-Man, Captain America, etc. Then these new superheroes I've never heard of before began popping up on the shelves. Plus the artwork of the initial releases was great… Rick Buckler, Alex Nino, Rudy Nebres, Gray Morrow, Eduardo Barreto… I was hooked. It wasn't until later that I learned that these heroes have been around a whole lot longer.

***SGMC**: Who is your favorite Crusader?*

Reno: Steel Sterling was my initial favorite. I also like the Fox for his simple yet very sleek costume. Later on, in the Impact line from DC, the Fly and Black Hood were my favorites.

***SGMC**: Where did you study art?*

Reno: As a little kid, I was always drawing. Later in early high school, I studied under one of the best comic book illustrators in the Philippines, Hal Santiago. He really taught me a lot about illustrating for comics. I also took up Fine Arts at the University of Santo Tomas.

***SGMC**: Who were your comic art inspirations?*

Reno: The aforementioned Hal Santiago, without whom I would never have discovered the great illustrators of the past like Hal Foster, Alex Raymond, Al Williamson, Reed Crandall, and many others. As for superhero work, I think my greatest inspiration is John Byrne.

***SGMC**: What made you start the Retro Cover Project?*

Reno: I had stumbled upon Ross Pearsall's website, *Super-Team Family… the Lost Issues*, back then known as

Brave and the Bold the Lost Issues, and it was a ton of fun, seeing these improbable, and, most likely, impossible team-ups. During that time, Jim Shelley of Flashback Universe was also occasionally commissioning me spot illustrations for some RPGs he was developing, and he commissioned some pieces from me for a feature he was doing called *Lost 100-Pagers*, something very much in the same vein as *Super-Team Family*. I had fun drawing those, so I started my own version, which is the *Retro Cover Project*.

***SGMC**: How often do you update the Retro Cover Project?*

Reno: Not as much as I'd like. I started with the goal of updating at least once a month, but official work has kept me so busy that I only update if I have free time to do a piece for the website.

***SGMC**: How do you decide which characters to use?*

Reno: They just pop in my head, actually. It's like... wouldn't it be cool to have this character meet that character, or these two or three characters are a natural fit and they haven't been together before, or what would have happened if this comic didn't get canceled... that sort of stuff.

***SGMC**: What are the elements for a good comic cover?*

Reno: I'm a bit old school, so I'd like a cover to hook me from the get-go—something should be happening on the cover that's intriguing enough that it makes me want to pick up the book and read it. That doesn't happen much with comic books nowadays.

***SGMC**: Do these mock covers help draw more attention to Maskarado?*

Reno: I honestly don't know. I have had interest from some readers outside the Philippines about *Maskarado*, but I don't know if those were through the *Retro Cover Project*.

***SGMC**: For anyone who doesn't know, what is Maskarado?*

Reno: *Maskarado* (translated as Masked, or Masked Man) is a superhero I created in the early 1990s and ran as a newspaper comic strip. I revived the character as a self-published series in the early 2000s. The collected editions are available digitally at gumroad.com for a very cheap price, and a couple of issues are free to read on the Graphite comics app.

***SGMC**: Do you take requests on your mock covers?*

Reno: I'm open to requests or suggestions, although as I've stated above, because of my busy workload, it may take time for me to be able to draw them.

Super-Team Family Presents: Ross Pearsall & Rik Offenberger

by Rik Offenberger

Ross Pearsall has a wonderful blog—*Super-Team Family: The Lost Issues!*—found at https://braveandboldlost.blogspot.com/. The blog has thousands of mock team-up covers in every combination you could ever think of *and* he's been at it for 10 years. I love his work, and Ross was nice enough to talk with me about his fandom and his process.

***Shield G-Man Club**: When did you discover comics?*

Ross Pearsall: At a very young age. I had older siblings so I can't remember a time when there weren't some comics around.

***SGMC**: Were your parents supportive of your reading comics?*

Ross: They didn't pay much attention to it.

SUPER-TEAM FAMILY
PRESENTS...
THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
AND
THE FLY
YOU'VE GOT TO HELP ME, SPIDER-MAN! THE FATE OF THE CITY DEPENDS ON IT!
MAY I, WELL NEVER TRUST A FLY! NEVER!

***SGMC**: Which comics were your favorites?*

Ross: Team-up and team books—Justice League of America, The Brave & the Bold, Marvel Two-In-One, Marvel Team-Up, Avengers, DC Comics Presents—that sort of thing.

***SGMC**: When did you discover the Mighty Crusaders?*

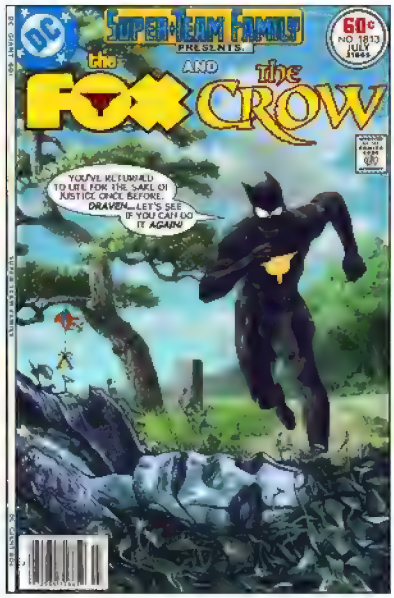
Ross: I was aware of them, but I was mostly a Marvel and DC guy, so I didn't read any of their exploits until the Impact Comics era.

***SGMC**: What attracted you to them?*

Ross: Their integration into the DCU, but that never really materialized

***SGMC**: Who is your favorite Crusader?*

Ross: I liked The Fly.


SUPER-TEAM FAMILY
PRESENTS...
THE FOX
AND
THE CROW
YOU'VE RETURNED TO LURE FOR THE SAKE OF JUSTICE ONCE BEFORE, DRAVEN... LET'S SEE IF YOU CAN DO IT AGAIN!

***SGMC**: What made you start cutting up comic covers and recombining the images?*

Ross: Boredom. I was making them for my own amusement before deciding to present the covers as a blog.

***SGMC**: How do you remove the unwanted parts of the cover?*

Ross: I started with MS Paint and switched to Photoshop after a couple of years. You can see a video tutorial in the middle of this interview: *Ross Pearsall says 'Super-Team Family Assemble!'*

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FgjMLNU_hgw

***SGMC**: Where did you get all the logos?*

Ross: Same place as the images of the characters, from existing comics. Once in a blue moon, I will have to create one on my own if a character does not have their own specific logo.

SGMC: *How do you decide which characters to combine?*

Ross: Either from suggestions, something I think would be exciting, interesting or funny, or sometimes I just see images that I think will go well together and work from there.

SGMC: *How long does it take you to find the images, combine them and put it out for the world to see?*

Ross: Depends on the complexity of the cover, but generally 4-5 hours.

SGMC: *Do you do one a day or do you stockpile a lot of covers at once and release them once a day?*

Ross: I try to keep ahead of the blog in case I get too busy or have creator's block, to ensure a daily post. So far, I've been able to keep up!

SGMC: *How many covers have you done over the last 10 years?*

Ross: Well, I posted 510 The Brave & the Bold and Marvel Two-In-One covers before starting the Super-Team Family covers, which are sequential. So at this writing, I have posted 3,342 covers.

SGMC: *How do you not run out of ideas?*

Ross: When the concept is anyone meets anyone, the possibilities are truly endless!

SGMC: *In addition to the blog, Facebook and Twitter, each day you also have a Patreon at patreon.com/STFthe-LostIssues. What do people get on the Patreon?*

Ross: I have to be careful about that because while I create new content, I am using existing images and characters that I do not own. So I can't ever sell images of my work on T-shirts or things like that.

I don't know the red tape about offering Patreon incentives because of that either, so it's strictly for folks who want to support the blog on a voluntary basis, and ensure that it continues. I do try to give Patrons special considerations if they have team-up requests.

SGMC: *Do you take requests?*

Ross: Yes and I get many. I don't respond to them all because the answer is always the same – Maybe if I can figure out a good idea and find the images to make it work – but I do take notes and try to make some requests a reality. Like I said above, Patrons get special consideration. And if you absolutely need me to drop everything and make a mash-up from your idea, I do commissions for $300 each.

SUPER-TEAM FAMILY
PRESENTS
AND
CAPTAIN AMERICA AND THE SHIELD
TOGETHER AT LAST IN ONE AMAZING TALE!
"PATRIOT GAMES!"
LOOK ALIVE, SHIELD! WE CAN'T ALLOW THESE SABOTEURS TO DESTROY THE DAM!
BUT, CAP... THEY'RE ACTING UNDER DIRECT ORDERS OF THE PRESIDENT!

IMAGINARY COVERS!

by Jim Burrows

While the Mighty Crusaders and the rest of MLJ's heroes have been around just as long as those from the Big Two —DC and Marvel—their presence hasn't been nearly as continuous. Every decade or so, they show up for a year or three and then vanish away only to re-emerge after another handful of years. The many hiatuses leave fans wishing and hoping for more, and… filling the gaps with their own imaginings of what our ultra-heroes might be up to next.

One of the ways that those imaginings manifest is as *faux* covers for nonexistent MLJ/Archie/Crusader comics, often as stand-alone images, but sometimes with synopses of the stories within. Another way, of course, is straight textual fan fiction, such as Joe Sewell's "*The Impact of the Shields*", covered in issue 1 and the many other fanfic seen on the Mighty Crusader Network boards.

What follows are short profiles of several of the creators of these imaginary covers, and their work. Some are the fans who commissioned the artwork, and others are fans who are themselves professional or amateur artists. What all of them share is a love of the comics and the heroes who have populated them for the last 80 years.

Interviews with many of the creators make up the rest of the issue. Enjoy!

Agent Shield:
Rik Offenberger, Mitchell Kwok & others

One of the most ambitious of these projects is our own Editor in Chief, Rik Offenberger's *Agent Shield,* which centers around a character of his own invention: FBI agent, Simon N. Kirby, a.k.a. Agent Shield, a worthy modern-day successor to the *original* 'original Shield', Joe Higgins.

Envisioned as a 100-issue imaginary series, Agent Shield has already seen 84 regular issues and several specials. As with any major superhero effort these days, there have been multi-issue arcs, cross-overs and continuity-altering mega-events.

Rik's most frequent collaborator on *Agent Shield* has been Mitchell Kwok, who has drawn nearly all of the covers for the regular issues. Special issues have featured the artwork of Gilbert Monsanto, Tavis Cardenas, Jay Piscopo and Gregg Whitmore. When Mitch was unavailable, Rik even did a few covers of his own.

The story is generally Rik's purview, but he has shared writing credits with Joe Sewell, Eric N. Bennett, Mitchell Kwok, Mike Spagnola, and yours truly, making *Agent Shield* a Shield G-Man Club institution. The series can be found both on a Mighty Crusaders Network page and Rik's DeviantArt gallery.

Michael Dunne talks about commissions & Too Many Heroes

by Rik Offenberger

I have known Michael Dunne for as long as I have been online. We are both fans of the Mighty Crusaders and old comics and we bonded over that. Mike has been a contributor at First Comics News with me as well. He and his wife Amy have attended conventions and done convention reports for First Comics News as well. However, we never had the chance to really sit down and dig into his fandom. Fortunately, this fanzine has given us a chance to look at his collection of commissions and cover recreations.

***Shield G-Man Club**: How old were you when you discovered comics?*

Michael Dunne: I would like to say six or so. I know the first comic I ever bought was Superboy #87, the second was Green Lantern #5, but I had to have been reading them beforehand to have begged my parents to let me buy them.

STILL 10¢
SUPERBOY
featuring SUPERBABY in "The THOUGHT MONSTER of KRYPTON!"
FUNNY ANIMAL! ITS HEAD LOOK LIKE TV SCREEN, HIM THINKING HIM WANT TO EAT ME. BUT ME NOT AFRAID! ME PLAY WITH HIM!
Introducing KOLLI, KRYPTO'S SUPER-SWEETHEART!

***SGMC**: What attracted you to them?*

Mike: Offhand, I would have to say the bright and colorful costumes.

***SGMC**: Did your parents encourage your hobby?*

Mike: Absolutely not, they would allow me to buy one book a month. I quickly learned to use my milk money to buy comics instead. Smuggling them into the house was another issue, but I became quite inventive.

***SGMC**: How does your wife feel about the time money and energy that goes into your hobby?*

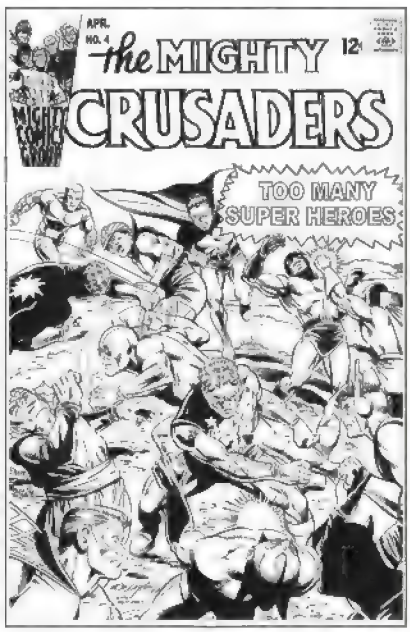
Mike: Amy has fully embraced the hobby and gives me commissions every birthday and Christmas. She also has encouraged me to make outrageous purchases like my Silver Age Atom #7 page. I would lovingly say she is an enabler.

***SGMC**: When did you discover the Mighty Crusaders?*

Mike: In the 60s when Archie made a run at the superhero craze with the rechristening of the Fly as Fly-Man. I was aware of the Fly and the Jaguar and would read their stories occasionally, but at that age, I did not appreciate the Archie superhero artists the way I did Infantino, Gil Kane or Jack Kirby. Again the bright colorful costumes caught my eye. How could you not love the Shield?

***SGMC**: What made you connect with the Crusaders?*

Mike: Crusaders #4. Oh my gosh, that cover and all those heroes in one book. I would say that arguably that may have been Jerry Siegel's best Mighty Comics story.

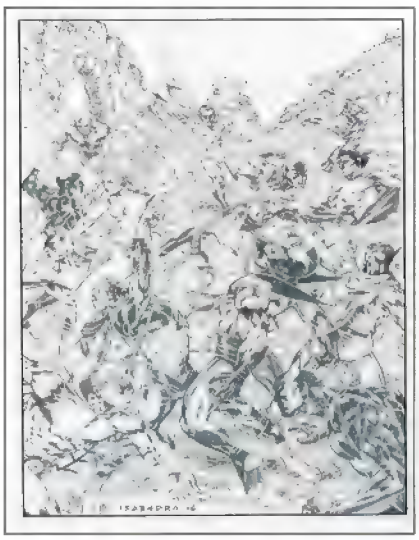


***SGMC**: Who is your favorite?*

Mike: The Shield followed closely by the Web. There is something about that costume that intrigues me, especially the scalloped mask. The only artist who ever seems to

have nailed it properly is Paul Reinman. I like the character so much that I commissioned George Perez to do his take on the character.

***SGMC**: When did you start collecting commissions?*



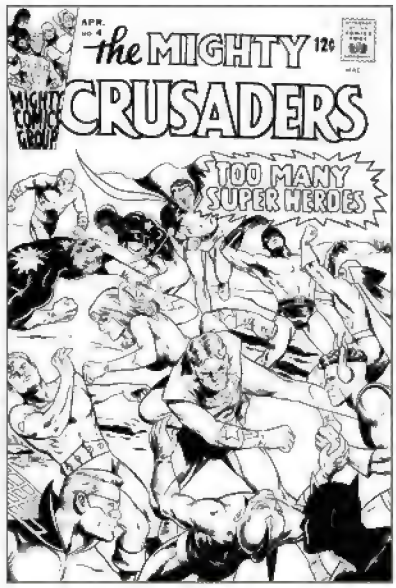
Mike: 2002, after discovering the internet. The first one was a Dick Ayers Western followed closely by a Gene Colan commission and a Shelly Mold-off early Silver Age Batman family commission. I cannot tell you how thrilled I was to have a commission by the man who had entertained me as a 7- or 8-year-old. I love those late 50s, early 60s Batman stories.

***SGMC**: How do you choose an artist for a commission?*

Mike: Initially, I tried to get the artists I grew up with doing their take on familiar characters. Most have passed on now, so when I do a commission, it is to follow a theme like, say, my Crusaders # 4 reinterpretations or Bruce McCorkindale's Amazing Blue Beetle reinterpretations... If not a theme, than I want to see the artist's take on MLJ-Mighty or JSA characters.

***SGMC**: The Mighty Crusaders have a lot of uniform variation in each hero. What elements are important to you?*

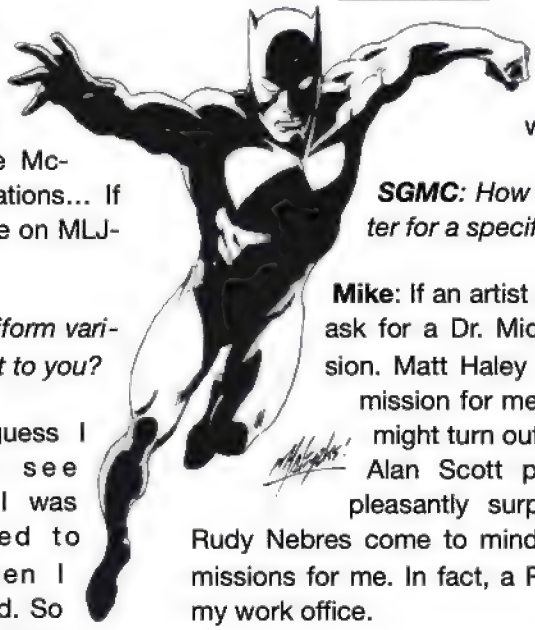
Mike: I guess I want to see them as I was introduced to them when I was a child. So I do want to see the Shield with trunks. I absolutely want to see the Comet with the original uniform and with the Giant-Man style boots (I realize Jack Cole designed that look long before Kirby.) I cannot decide on the Hangman, with a cape without a cape? With a cowl that covers the nose a la Batman or without? That's usually, for me, an Artist's choice. Buzz did a killer Hangman for me.



***SGMC**: You have hundreds of pieces of original art. What do you do with all of them?*

Mike: A lot are framed. The rest are stored in Ikoyas. Perhaps I need a bigger house with more walls. Amy has no issues with art on the second floor of our home and has slowly allowed some art to creep downstairs. I think five very special, cherished works are framed downstairs.

***SGMC**: When did you decide to share them on Comic-ArtFans.com?*



Mike: Shortly after I discovered Bill Cox's wonderful site.

***SGMC**: How do you decide on a character for a specific artist?*

Mike: If an artist uses a lot of blacks, I might ask for a Dr. Mid-Nite or Hourman commission. Matt Haley did an incredible Fox commission for me. If I am unsure of how they might turn out, I usually ask for a Shield or Alan Scott piece. Sometimes, you get pleasantly surprised. Allan Goldman and Rudy Nebres come to mind—both did incredible commissions for me. In fact, a Rudy Nebres piece hangs in my work office.

***SGMC**: I know the price is different for each artist but what is the price range for a professional commission?*

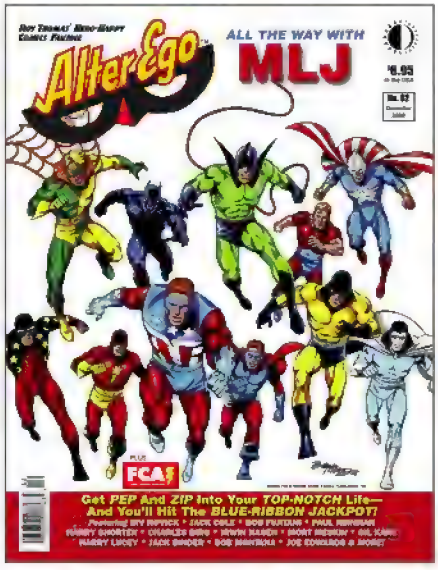
Mike: That is hard to answer because prices have escalated so much in recent years. There are some artists I would like to commission, but their ask is way too high. I do understand an artist must put a value on their work; I also think you have to understand the market.

***SGMC**: You have a lot of versions of "Too Many Heroes". What makes this cover so appealing to you?*

Mike: It is magic to me, just like Justice League #2, Avengers #4 or Hawkman #1.

***SGMC**: How much of the final version is your vision and how much is the artist's inspiration?*

Mike: When it is Crusaders #4, I ask that they do their take on the cover, usually asking for the Fly and Spider to be left out and giving them a few characters like Steel Sterling or Fly Girl as possible options. For Justice Society commissions, I have learned to be more direct in my ask as time has gone on. One of my favorites is Bob McLeod's MLJ-Mighty Commission. That was one of my earliest, and at the time, most expensive commissions, and I simply asked Bob to draw the MLJ characters. Early on, I learned to make sure to provide a reference.



***SGMC**: A few of your pieces have ended up in print, specifically in Roy Thomas' Alter Ego. How did that relationship come about?*

Mike: Roy and I have corresponded throughout the years, since I started collecting original art in 2002. I have sent him copies of my acquisitions and he has sometimes chosen to print them in his magazine. Four and a third of my commissions have become covers for Alter-Ego, two of which have featured the MLJ characters.

***SGMC**: When they pay you to use your art, does it cover the cost of the commission?*

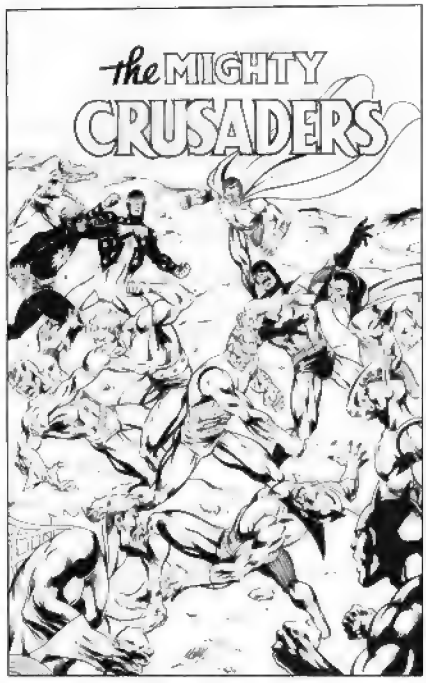
Mike: No. Generally, if my art is used, I get a free copy of that issue. Regarding the covers, I believe I received a small fee for the Christmas commission that was used for a cover. I do not believe any money was paid for the use of my commissions for the MLJ-Mighty covers or the Justice Society back cover for issue 50.

***SGMC**: What advice can you give someone interested in starting to collect commissions?*

Mike: First of all, provide reference. I can recall a story that Gene Colan did a commission (which was not for me) and he drew Captain Marvel, his version—the commissioner wanted Gene's take on the Fawcett character or *vice versa*. I provided a reference for a character once and the artist drew the hero's original uniform—I wanted the second and far superior version.

If you have a particular scenario in mind communicate that politely with the artist.

Finally, understand that the money you spend on commissions you will most likely not get back if you decide to sell the art down the road. Commission what you like, because they are to be enjoyed, and frame them if possible. I walk by my Bob Layton JSA and Rick Hoberg All-Star Squadron commissions every time I walk down my stairs and I smile every time I look at them. That is what commissioning is all about.



Leonard Morgan and his Mystic Journey with the Mighty Crusaders

by Rik Offenberger

I discovered Mystic Morgan online with some incredible redesigns of the Mighty Crusaders. Like the Impact line, he had reimagined the entire line giving the heroes new identities and backstories. He put together a cohesive universe for his new vision. Some characters stayed true to their roots while others had very radical departures from what had gone before.

Shield G-Man Club: *How old were you when you discovered comics?*

Leonard Morgan: About eight years old.

SGMC: *What attracted you to them?*

Leonard: The stories and especially the art.

SGMC: *Did your parents encourage your hobby?*

Leonard: My mother was a comic book fan and she is the reason I started reading them. She used to send me to the store and go through the comic book rack and buy new ones. I got really good at that, knowing they would paint the tops of the comic book bundles a different color each month, so I'd just look for the new color, grab them and dish out the dimes she gave me.

SGMC: *When did you start drawing superheroes?*

Leonard: About twelve years old. I would send some to Julius Schwartz, Editor of DC Comics and he always sent a letter back encouraging me to keep going.

SGMC: *Where did you study art?*

Leonard: Mount San Antonio College. The only class that helped was life drawing. My tutor (even if he didn't know it) was studying my favorite artist Steve Ditko. He put so much movement in his art.

SGMC: *When did you discover the Mighty Crusaders?*

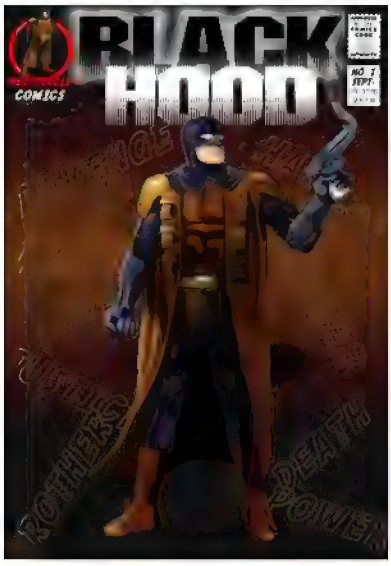
Leonard: Around 1965. I used to read The Fly (Fly-Man) and so found them then.

SGMC: *What made you connect with the Crusaders?*

Leonard: Connect? That is a good question because as I was older and read other comics publications, I found them to be struggling to compete and of course, I am always a fan of the underdog.

SGMC: *Who is your favorite?*

Leonard: The Fly (Fly-Man) I always thought if created correctly he could have given Spider-Man comics a run for their money. As you can see by my first concept of the Fly, I recreated the first issue of Spider-Man just to prove that point.



***SGMC**: What makes the Mighty Crusaders fun to draw?*

Leonard: The challenge to make them stand out.

***SGMC**: You did a fun redesign of the Crusaders. What elements were important to keep?*

Leonard: To keep a hint of the original character but to go the extra mile to bring them up to date by not only their look but their origin.

***SGMC**: You added a respirator mask to the Shield. What was the purpose of the respirator masks?*

Leonard: It was part of the original design for the government and also to hide his identity.

***SGMC**: The most radical departure was the Wizard. What connected your Wizard to the original?*

Leonard: I wanted him to be more mystical. Inline with Dr. Strange and other comic supernatural heroes like Doctor Fate.

***SGMC**: What elements are needed for a fun superhero story?*

Leonard: Humor is important, but a well-written story.

***SGMC**: After you posted the Shield-Master image, Jim Simon wanted to hire you. Whatever came of that?*

Leonard: A difference of opinion. Maybe we should leave it at that.

***SGMC**: Are you still making new comics these days?*

Leonard: I think of myself more of a creator artist. What I mean by that is I like to come up with concepts, storylines, and character design. Like Stan Lee. I add new ideas and concepts all the time on my website at bold-comics.com

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Kent Clark, The Man of (pencil) Lead

by Rik Offenberger

Kent Clark is in several Facebook groups with me. I've enjoyed his art in *InDELLible* and *Fans of YEET Presents*. He had provided several pieced to the group and even sent me a personal Shield sketch card that became the Bill Higgins trading card from the club's membership kit.

***Shield G-Man Club**: I love your name. Did your parents think of Superman when you were born or is it just a coincidence?*

Kent Clark: My full name is Vernon Kently Clark. I'm named after my dad. I doubt his parents realized the similarity because they were rural farmers. I don't even know if they had a TV to see the *Adventures of Superman* show. And I was born in '72, so the Supermania from the movie hadn't hit yet, but it definitely made elementary school interesting.

***SGMC**: When did you discover comics?*

Kent: I actively began collecting when I was about 12, so it would have been the mid-80s.

***SGMC**: Were your parents supportive of your reading comics?*

Kent: They didn't really care so long as the comics didn't appear 'demonic'.

***SGMC**: Which comics were your favorites?*

Kent: John Byrne's art was the catalyst for my obsession, so anything drawn by him. At that time, it would have been the Fantastic Four, X-men and Alpha Flight. Alpha Flight was my first BIG favorite.

***SGMC**: When did you start drawing comic characters?*

Kent: I'd always liked drawing but drawing supers came at the same time as my comics obsession.

***SGMC**: Where did you study art?*

Kent: School art classes, Art Instruction Schools correspondence course and Rogers University in Claremore.

Kent Clark

***SGMC**: You do a lot of sketches. Do you post new sketches every day?*

Kent: It comes and goes. Seems cyclical. I'll have a busy month where I draw a lot followed by a month of very little. I'm trying the daily drawing for a year again in 2020, so I'll be trying at least one a day.

***SGMC**: What is Equinox Comics?*

Kent: A few people around Tulsa, Oklahoma trying to put out comics simply for the love of it.

***SGMC**: What is YEET?*

Kent: YEET is the official comic book anthology of the Facebook group, Old Guys Who Love Old Comics. The group was created by Jason Mink, the comic by Mike Jones. It is a Patreon funded endeavor that has included submissions by amateurs and pros alike. William Messner-Loebs, Tom Orzechowski, Fred Hem-

beck, Arvell Jones, Al Milgrom and Bob Wiacek included.

***SGMC**: What is Popular Comics?*

Kent: Popular Comics is a book by a group of creators who, under the InDELLible name, are attempting to revive the old DELL comics through existing Public Domain characters as well as all-new ideas.

***SGMC**: When did you discover the Mighty Crusaders?*

Kent: I've known of them since the revival in the '80s, but I can't claim to have known a great deal about them at that time. I remember seeing the books that were being released then but, I'm ashamed to say, I didn't actively seek them out until I was older and more interested in finding the back issues.

***SGMC**: What did you think of the quirkiness of the '60s version?*

Kent: I enjoy Silver Age comics in general, of which the Mighty line was, in my opinion, a fun example. I liked the quirkiness. It could get a little tiring at times, but overall it was fun, seeing what seemed like creators just being able to enjoy themselves.

***SGMC**: What attracted you to them?*

Kent: I enjoy the big two, but the outsider companies are a nice change of pace from the status quo. Plus, as an artist, the designs and artwork are always a big draw.

***SGMC**: Who is your favorite MLJ character?*

Kent: I would say The Web. I really find it intriguing, especially with the '60s era, how they gave his wife such a large role to play. Not only does she know about his crimefighting but she actively tries to dissuade it! To the point where she even tries to put on a costume herself!

***SGMC**: What do you think has made them so enduring that they have been published for 80 years?*

Kent: I think fans are always curious about the 'other' companies. Especially when they realize that it's a superhero line from the company of Archie! I don't think many fans, especially the young ones, know that Archie Comics started out with superheroes first. Not to mention having a patriotic hero before Captain America! I think all of this, along with what I said above about the change of pace from the mainstream books, as well as the fun and exciting visuals, will keep the MLJ/Archie heroes around in some form forever.

Gregg Whitmore, Bringing Fun and Color to the Mighty Crusaders

by Rik Offenberger

I have known Gregg Whitmore for years. We met on the Mighty Crusaders Message Board and together made avatars for every MLJ hero using the FH Animated version of Fábrica de Heróis/Hero-O'Matic. We have worked together on several Mighty Crusaders-related items over the years.

***Shield G-Man Club**: When did you discover comics?*

Gregg Whitmore: '71 or '72. I was a huge fan of the Batman TV show and it made a huge impression on my then three-year-old mind in '66. I remember seeing Robin on a comics cover – either JLoA #92 or Teen Titans #36. I was sold after that.

***SGMC**: Were your parents supportive of your reading comics?*

Gregg: Nope, but they ignored it due to my other voracious reading.

***SGMC**: Which comics were your favorites?*

Gregg: Justice League, Teen Titans, Avengers, Defenders, New X-Men, Tomb of Dracula, Master of Kung Fu, anything written by Steve Englehart, Steve Gerber or Len Wein: anything drawn by George Perez, Dave Cockrum, or Sal Buscema.

***SGMC**: When did you discover the Mighty Crusaders?*

Gregg: During the 1980s Red Circle run. My initial thought was they were trying to copy Marvel and there were too many "new" characters with similar names or little that made them unique. Bought the first two issues of Mighty Crusaders, then passed on the rest.

***SGMC**: What brought you back to them?*

Gregg: I became a convert during the Impact era. I loved those titles and creators. Ironically, I felt the team book was the weakest of the lot. But I bought everything. I'm still fond of the female Jaguar.

***SGMC**: Who is your favorite Crusader?*

Gregg: Hard to say. I think all of the Crusaders and the other MLJ heroes have tons of untapped potential. Shield, Black Hood, Comet, Fly and Fly Girl, Jaguar, Web, Steel Sterling… all could be amazing.

***SGMC**: What did you think about the quirkiness of the '60s Crusaders?*

Gregg: I bought almost all of them starting in 2007 when I started collecting Archie comics. I felt the Fly and Jaguar were strong books initially, but the addition of the other heroes, their wacky backstories, the campiness, the attempt again to copy Marvel, and weak art made them pretty forgettable. I have them all except a handful of the earliest Adventures of the Fly books and the backups that were in the regular Archie books, Pep and Laugh, I think.

***SGMC**: When did you get into Fanzines?*

Gregg: Back in the '80s. I loved Amazing Heroes and was a regular contributor to the 1990s APA Titantalk.

***SGMC**: What attracts you to fanzines?*

Gregg: The history, the fan art, the projects that never were published. I love the Comic Reader covers.

***SGMC**: When did you get into MLJ Fandom?*

Gregg: During 2007? After I found your Mighty Crusaders Message Board!

***SGMC**: What makes the MLJ heroes so special to you that you want to create new material with them?*

Gregg: Again, I think they all have vast, untapped potential that ArchieCo has never come close to tapping.

***SGMC**: When did you start coloring comic art?*

Gregg: After I found an artist named E.J. Morges on your Mighty Crusaders Message Board doing costume updates. I really liked his version of the Fly and Hangman. Taught myself to color during that time.

***SGMC**: How long did it take before you felt you mastered the process?*

Gregg: I'm still mastering it.

***SGMC**: What programs do you use?*

Gregg: Primarily Paint.net, a free photoshopesque program for Windows. I've dabbled with Photoshop, but Paint's ease of use always draws me back.

***SGMC**: What made you start cutting up comic covers and recombining the images?*

Gregg: I was inspired by Ross Pearsall's *Super-Team Family: Lost Issues* blog. Decided to try it myself.

***SGMC**: How do you decide which characters to combine?*

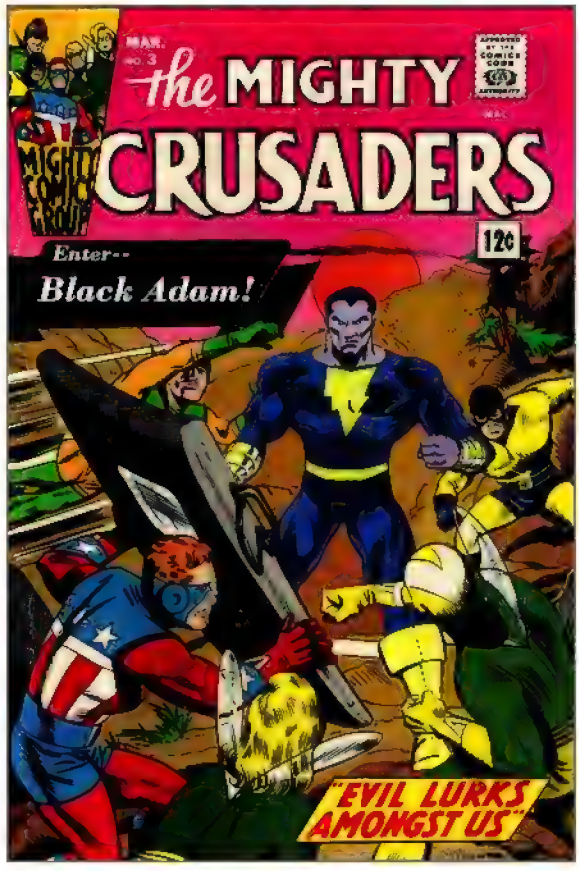
Gregg: I look for images that look like they'd go together. Also, odd pairings appeal to me.

***SGMC**: What are the elements for a good comic cover?*

Gregg: Not cluttered, a certain flow, a sense of fun and adventure. I like the images to appear by the same artist generally speaking.

***SGMC**: Do you take requests on your mock covers?*

Gregg: Yep. I love a challenge.



Anthony Conn: Reimagineer

by Rik Offenberger

Anthony Conn has a lot of love for the Mighty Crusaders, and decided to take up the pencil and update their look for the new millennium.

***Shield G-Man Club**: How old were you when you discovered comics?*

Anthony Conn: I discovered comics early on, via an older relative who was a massive fanboy, as massive as one could be living in rural northern Kentucky in the late 60s/1970s. For my fifth birthday, I received as a gift his "reading copies", a literal pick up truckload of his duplicate copies of a little bit of everything produced by Marvel and DC from about 1977 up to that month, May 1979.

I'd shown an interest in the superhero genre, Challenge of the Super Friends, SHAZAM, ISIS, live-action Spider-Man, and he took notice, and I guess he sensed a kindred spirit. I can still remember about a week later he had to explain to me the proper way to read comics in a serialized form—"You see these issue numbers on the cover?"—because I was having some confusion reading some UNCANNY X-MEN issues out of order.

***SGMC**: What attracted you to them?*

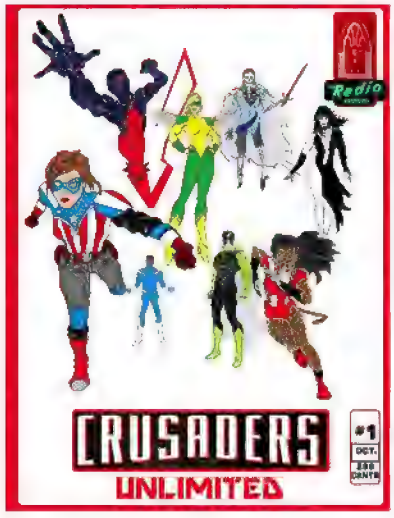
Anthony: I've given a lot of thought to this in the past, and the real reason is super sad and angry, filled with subjective childhood trauma, which I'll bore nobody with the details of, but it boils down to pure escapism. I was a hillbilly kid growing up in rural farmland on the banks of the Ohio River, a stone's throw across the river from Kentucky in the late 1970s/early 1980s. Next door to a pig farm. Imagine a town similar to Silver Age depictions of Superboy's Smallville... only if it were inhabited by casting call rejects from THE DUKES OF HAZZARD. Do the math.

***SGMC**: Did your parents encourage your hobby?*

Anthony: My dad? No. He was a career military guy who couldn't understand why his boy didn't wanna live out his high school sports dreams, but we've gotten over that now that I'm in my forties. My mother, on the other hand, didn't understand what the hell I was doing, but was supportive of it simply because she saw it brought me joy, bless her little heart.

***SGMC**: When did you start drawing superheroes?*

Anthony: Five or six years of age. I figured out early on from splash page credit boxes that, "Hey, somebody draws this stuff. What a great job, gotta be better than working in Grandpa's tobacco fields."

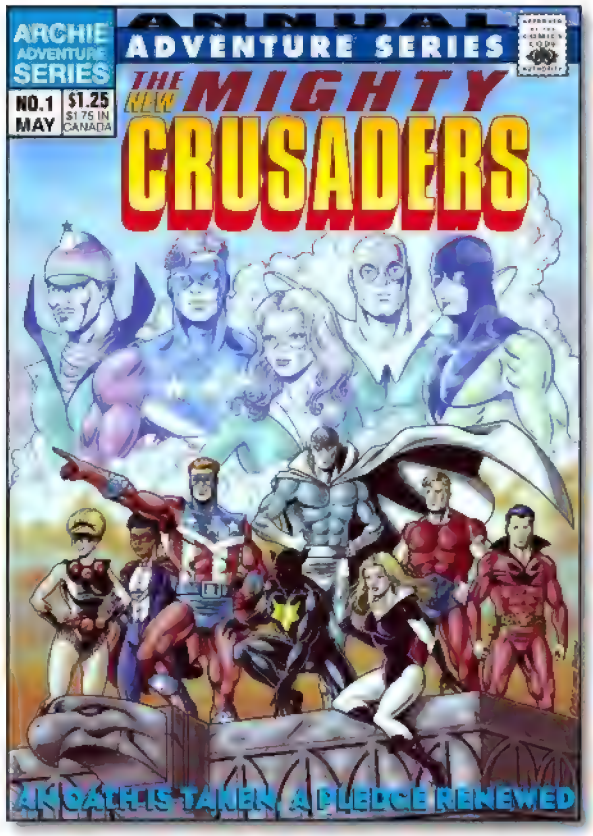


'Course, you're also talking to a kid who took an early interest in going to college because that's where Peter Parker is, and he's in New York, the "Big City". (Insert awe-inspired gasp.)

***SGMC**: Where did you study art?*

Anthony: Shawnee State University, Portsmouth, Ohio, a

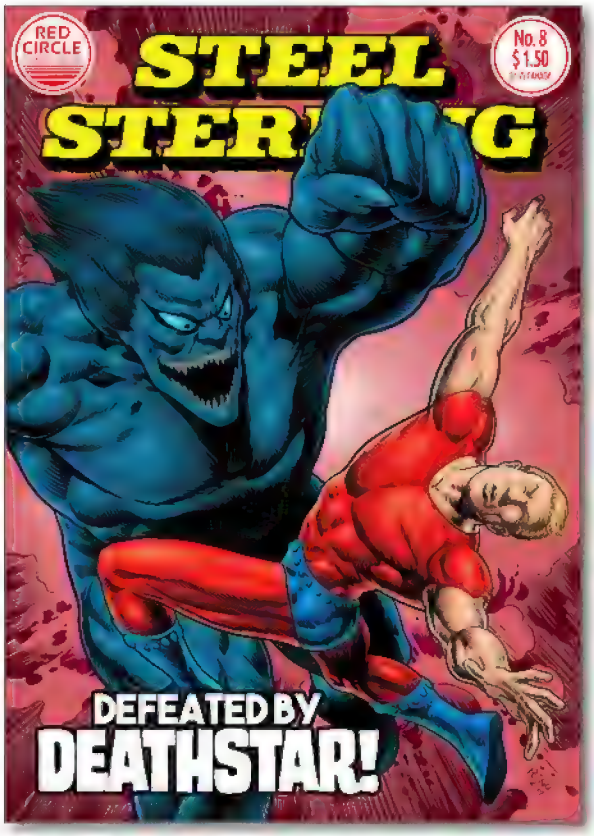
Crusaders Imaginary Covers: Kevin Moorhead



Another ambitious collection is that of Kevin Moorhead. Kevin's *Mighty Crusaders volume 2* series, starting with issue 14, features ongoing story synopses as well as artwork, rather like Rik's Agent Shield. To date, he has commissioned nearly two dozen regular issues, an annual and a couple of specials, all of which can be seen in a gallery in the "After the Crusade" section of the Mighty Crusaders Network web site.

And this isn't Kevin's only imaginary cover collection. Rather, it is only part of a much larger collection of original comic book artwork and commissions which can be seen in his gallery on the ComicArtFans site. These include a *Red Circle Spotlight* series, MLJ heroes and team-ups and scores of commissions based on the whole range of comics publishers.

Kevin wrote about how the Crusaders' lineup has evolved in his alternate storyline in an article for issue #1 of this 'zine: "The Coming of the Crusaders! (or at Least Their Line-ups)", a version of which can also be found on the Mighty Crusaders Network web site.



Retro Cover Project: Reno Maniquis

Having done imaginary covers for Jim Shelley's *Lost 100 Pagers* project (which centers on DC comics or we'd be covering it here), Filipino artist, illustrator and art director, Reno Maniquis, decided to create a series of his own: the Retro-Cover Project. So far, three of those covers have featured Archie/MLJ characters, each titled and numbered as if they continued one of Archie's retired books:

•"Blue Ribbon #15" with Darkling, Jaguar, and the Druid.

•"Steel Sterling #8", with Steel Sterling and Deathstar.

•"The Fly #10" with Fly Girl.

They are well enough executed that I started looking for someplace to purchase Blue Ribbon #15 when the cover showed up in my search for reference pictures of the Jaguar to use as I created my HeroMachine image of him. I eventually cribbed the pose for my article in issue #1 of this 'zine. His original appears in that article, as well.

southern satellite campus of Ohio State University. By "study" you mean, "work as a counter jockey two blocks off-campus at a comic shop, attend a lot of life drawing courses, sleep through lectures, and put my time in for a Bachelor's in Arts & Humanities", right?

I have a confession. I failed the only required math course for the degree, "Math 101", basically an eighth-grade algebra refresher, twice. The third time was a charm, though.

***SGMC**: When did you discover the Mighty Crusaders?*

Anthony: The Red Circle relaunch of 1983, explains the complete mint on-card Remco Mighty Crusaders collection hanging on my studio wall. Newsstand distribution in southern Ohio in the early 1980s was weird because I used to buy them at the most off the grid places, the gas station on the edge of town, the Mom 'n' Pop General Store out in the boonies, not the "normal" venues for comics in my childhood: the drug store and grocery store located within the hometown proper.

***SGMC**: What was so special about Impact Comics?*

Anthony: For me, at the time—I woulda been a junior/senior in high school circa 1991/92—it was character recognition. "Hey, cool, DC's doing something with the Archie superheroes." I was a massive fan of the Impact JAGUAR, FLY, and THE WEB. I thought the WEB was a particularly interesting take on the property, and I'm kind of a fan of interesting twists or takes on superhero genre conventions. And I'm a sucker for any new shared universe concepts. Always have been.

In hindsight, there was some pretty amazing talent getting their start in the industry on those books, the late Mike Parobek on the Fly, David Williams on the Jaguar. I'd been a fan of Vosburg via AMERICAN FLAGG prior to THE BLACK HOOD.

***SGMC**: What did you think of the quirkiness of the 60s version?*

Anthony: They're just fun comics. I've always found it odd and interesting how they decided to take their approach to 1960s camp humor. I described it to a friend once like this:

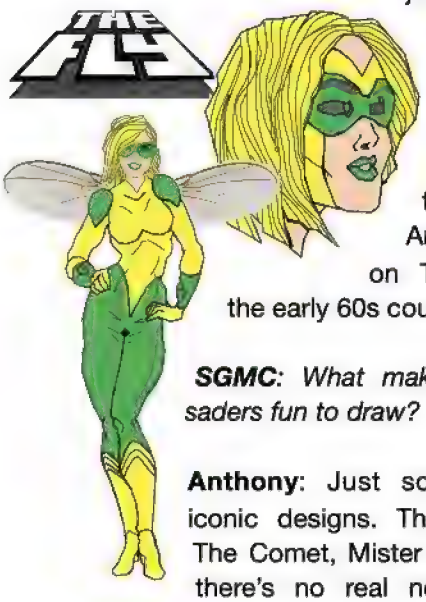
"Stan Lee and the gang over at Marvel revolutionized serialized storytelling in the Sixties by creating these amazing hyperbole-driven superhero soap operas. Over at Archie/MLJ, they went kinda meta. I started doing superhero sitcoms, a response to the '66 Batman."

***SGMC**: What made you connect with the Crusaders?*

Anthony: Sadly, and I mean this in no disparaging way, but I've always dug the low rent, B-movie kinda aesthetic they hold. I've always viewed the Archie superhero properties as the superhero genre equivalent to grindhouse or exploitation movies, simply because of the lack of sales number success they've experienced since the 1960s. Hey, everyone should root for the underdog.

***SGMC**: Who is your favorite MLJ character?*

Anthony: Design-wise, The Comet in his Golden Age costume is pretty tight. I've always dug the Hangman, just a nutty guy with a noose, basically—the Punisher before the fact.



The Fox is always fun. Does the weird Archie Adventure take on THE SHADOW from the early 60s count?

***SGMC**: What makes the Mighty Crusaders fun to draw?*

Anthony: Just some really iconic designs. The Shield, The Comet, Mister Justice, there's no real need to change them. If it ain't broke, don't fix it, but it is fun to play around a bit.

***SGMC**: You did a fun redesign of the Crusaders. What elements were important to keep?*

Anthony: With each character, it's subjective. Sometimes it's a color scheme or theme. There's half of me that wants to throw a little "realism" into the designs, and the other half wants to keep something that's recognizable, that gives the character a look. I think a lot of it is just finding a happy medium.

***SGMC**: The most radical departure was the Fox. What connected your Fox to the original?*

Anthony: Well, there's the fox theme and aesthetic. I'd also been toying around with the idea of a working-class, hometown, grassroots superhero, but I think Bob Burden beat me to it with Flaming Carrot and the Mystery Men. What's more hometown and grassroots than high school sports? And the idea of a high school sports mascot suit is basically a low rent superhero costume. And the Fox has always been presented as this ordinary guy who just happens to throw on a goofy costume which suddenly makes him a magnet for weird s#*t.

***SGMC**: The Web became a family, how does that dynamic work?*

Anthony: That's actually inspired by the 1960s Mighty Comics take. They basically presented the Web as a sitcom about a henpecked husband whose wife bitched about him being a superhero. It was basically "The Life of Riley" with a costume.

So, I took the sitcom idea and turned it on its head; he's a father now with two daughters who wanna get in on the act. It's GIDGET, or BLOSSOM, with costumes.

I also dug the idea of a group of heroes who operated under one perceived public persona, like the Impact WEB, or the franchised superhero alter ego, which they explored a bit in the DC Red Circle Web stuff, a literal "web" or network of superheroes.

***SGMC**: What elements are needed for a fun superhero story?*

Anthony: I'm a big fan of self-referential humor. I'm a massive fan of the DeMatteis/Giffen era Justice League, and a lot of action.

***SGMC**: What do you think has made them so enduring that they have been published for 80 years?*

Anthony: Iconic designs, intriguing premises and core concepts, the weird cult appeal I find in the properties. Plus, the back issues are relatively cheap.

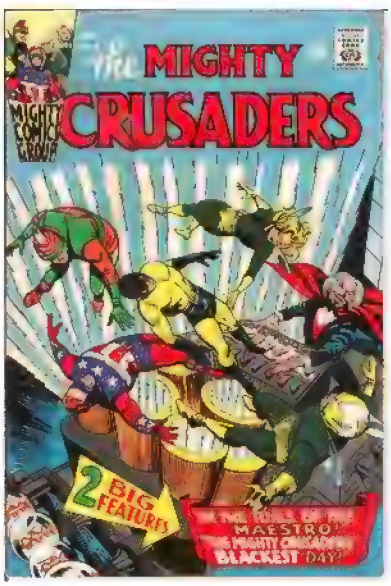
Comics are supposed to be fun, right? These are just good, old-fashioned fun characters. I get a kick outta them.

The Wright Stuff: Alex Wright Crusading Artist

by Rik Offenberger

It's hard for me to remember a time when I wasn't friends with Alex. I don't remember how we first met, but it was over the Mighty Crusaders, probably in 2001 or 2002. It may have been in a Mighty Crusaders chat group. He had done some photomorphs for the Mighty Crusaders and I told him he did a nice job. Over the years he has done many more. He did some just for the Mighty Crusaders Network website. He did some line art for my book; he provides a ton of cosplay photos for a Sunday column on First Comics News and he has offered advice for the proper care and training for the family Chihuahua.

***Shield G-Man Club**: How old were you when you discovered comics?*



Alex Wright: I was around 6 to 8 years old. The doorman in our apartment building gave me a stack of coverless comics. Among them was Mighty Crusaders #6.

***SGMC**: What attracted you to them?*

Alex: Colourful costumes.

***SGMC**: Did your parents encourage your hobby?*

Alex: Yes, they always encouraged me to read whether it was encyclopedias or comic books.

***SGMC**: When did you start drawing superheroes?*

Alex: I was drawing before I could read. So drawing superheroes started as soon as I started reading comics.

***SGMC**: Where did you study art?*

Alex: I studied Commercial Art at Blanche MacDonald Career College in Vancouver, BC.

***SGMC**: What made you connect with the Crusaders?*

Alex: Back then, The Crusaders had a campy vibe which appealed to my young mind.

***SGMC**: Who is your favorite?*

Alex: Of the originals, I'd say The Web. However, Darkling was/is my favourite all-around Crusader.

***SGMC**: What makes the Mighty Crusaders fun to draw?*

Alex: Those colourful costumes.

***SGMC**: When did you start doing photomorphs?*

Alex: In the late 90s.

SGMC: *The Mighty Crusaders have a lot of uniform variation in each hero. What elements are important to you?*

Alex: I prefer the Comet's moon and star costume with the red arrow to any of his others.

SGMC: *How did you do the All-Star Comics homage cover?*

Alex: The base picture was created by a friend sitting in each pose around a round table.

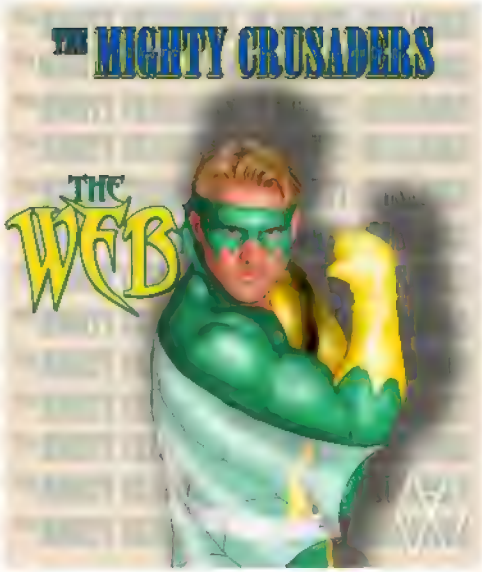
SGMC: *How do you select subjects for the photomorphs?*

Alex: If I'm recreating a cover then I look for a base model in the same pose (or as close as possible). Sometimes a base pic will suggest a hero to me and I'll go from there. It depends on the instance.

SGMC: *What tools to you use for your photomorphs?*

Alex: I use Photoshop exclusively.

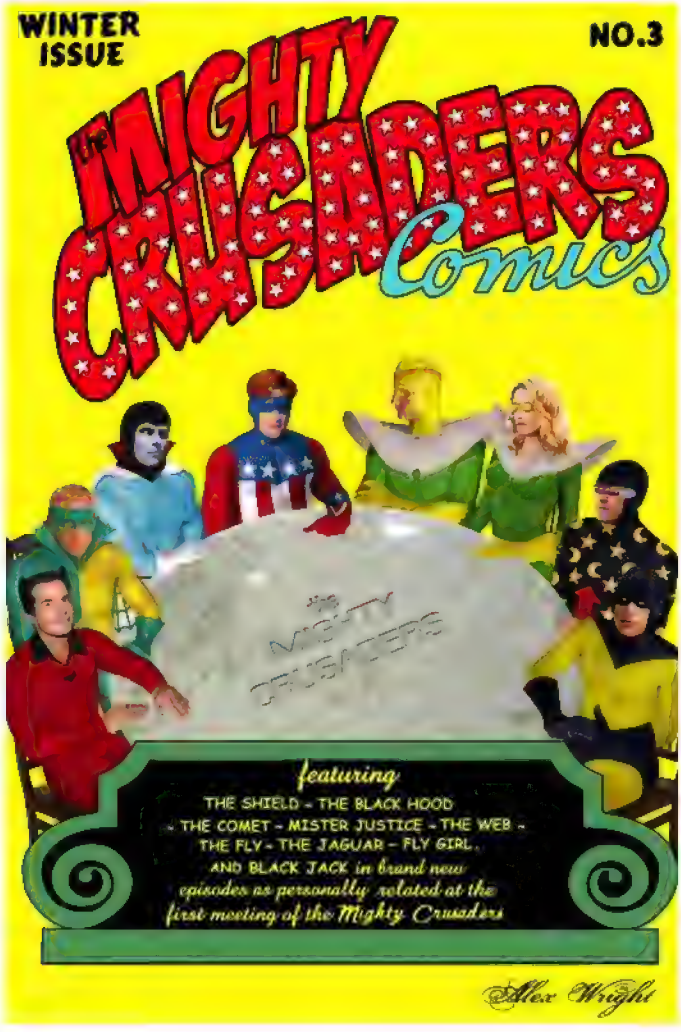
SGMC: *Which do you find more rewarding?*



Alex: When I discovered photomanipulation, I fell in love and rarely went back to line drawing. I blame Alex Ross for wanting to do photomorphs because I could never draw to his level of realism so 'morphs were the closest thing.

SGMC: *What are your artistic goals for 2020?*

Alex: After a year's hiatus, I plan to get back to work.


WINTER ISSUE
NO.3
MIGHTY CRUSADERS Comics
featuring
THE SHIELD - THE BLACK HOOD - THE COMET - MISTER JUSTICE - THE WEB - THE FLY - THE JAGUAR - FLY GIRL, AND BLACK JACK in brand new episodes as personally related at the first meeting of the Mighty Crusaders
Alex Wright

Fred Hembeck: From Fan to Fan-Favorite

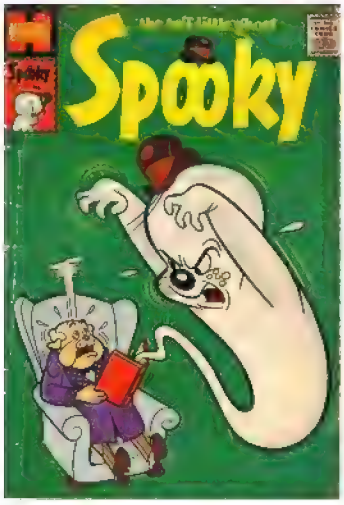
by Rik Offenberger

I have always been a fan of Fred Hembeck. Fred and I worked at the Comic Buyer's Guide at the same time in the 90s. We share a birthday and exchange pleasantries on Facebook. But I have never had the opportunity before now to sit down with Fred and chat about his career.

Shield G-Man Club: *How old were you when you discovered comics?*

Fred Hembeck: I was about six years old, maybe seven. My dad came home with a comic from work because a guy he worked with had a son who was getting older and he didn't care for them anymore. My first comic was a Spooky, The Tough Little Ghost. And so, I went to see if I liked it or not, and I liked it a lot. So, the next thing I know, I've got a whole box of comics. They were ninety-nine percent Harvey and Dell. There was one Jimmy Olsen and one World's Finest, but everything else was kiddie comics. By 1961, when I was eight years old, I first started buying my own comics from the stands. That's when I started buying the Superman comics, as my friends at school had impressed me with Bizarro. Bizarro is what started it off. Also, those crazy comics where Superman would have a large head because he's from the future or something.

SGMC: *When did you start drawing comics (not professionally, but as a kid)?*



Fred: I'd been drawing pretty much since I was in kindergarten. I remember tracing over Superman from one of the DC Comics. That was an early inspiration.

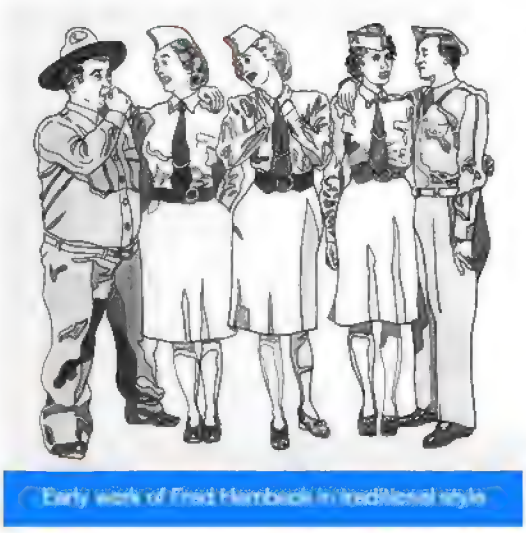
SGMC: *Where did you go to art school?*

Fred: I went to two schools for two years each. I went to the two-year local, State University of New York at Farmingdale, and they had an art course there—the same course taken by Len Wein several years earlier. Then I transferred to the State University at Buffalo. That was getting out of the house. I was at home for the first two years, and then moved to Buffalo, which is very far from Long Island and I couldn't drive there each day.

SGMC: *When did you go to your first convention?*

Fred: I don't remember the exact year, but it was a couple of years before I started in the business—I was in college. It was one of those Phil Seuling Conventions, one the big ones. I remember me and my friend going there.

SGMC: *What was your first comic con portfolio review like?*



Early work of Fred Hembeck in traditional style

Fred: Not good. They never were. I was living in my parents' home. I put my stuff in a portfolio, took the train into New York City, showed my stuff around the DC office, and they wanted me to leave it overnight. So, I did. I have no idea what they had to say about it. But later, when I took it to DC Comics and got an audience with Mr. Colletta, he was not at all happy with the work I'd come up with.

SGMC: *How did you develop your more quirky style?*

Fred: That's not what I was showing. It's just regular stuff I showed. It just kind of developed out of the fact that I got turned down and I needed to keep myself going. I was going to get a second portfolio together. And I was going to show everybody how great it was. But in the meantime, I should do something. I wanted to do this little strip here and thought "I'll send it into the Comic Buyer's Guide and, who knows what's going to happen?" I never did do that second portfolio; things kind of fell into place after that. Oddly enough, if I'd managed to do the work and get the job at DC, I would have been like

one mediocre guy who people would have forgotten about very soon after doing maybe three or four issues. So, it kind of worked out for the best.

SGMC: *How did you get involved in fanzines?*

Fred: Oh, I love fanzines. I started getting them in 1967. I saw that advertisement in a comic book for *Castle of Frankenstein Magazine* and I sent away for some of this stuff and it was just *really* good. At that point in my life—mid-teens—the friends of mine who had read comics had all bailed by the time we got to seventh grade, but I didn't. So, it's nice to have evidence that there are other people my age or even older who are interested in these things. For a while, about 1967 or 1968, I was probably more interested in the fanzines than I was in the actual comic books that were coming out. I would send a couple of drawings in, but never to the really big fanzines that people know about. Some things were published, you know, in a different style. Not the one I have now.

SGMC: *How did you end up at Eclipse Comics?*

Fred: That was because I was friends with Richard Bruning at the time. We'd been corresponding quite a bit and he was friends with Dean Mullaney and they had their first publication. It was Sabre, I believe, by Don McGregor and Paul Gulacy. They were late for a follow-up. It was slow in coming out. Richard said to Dean, "Hey, you know, why don't you collect a bunch of these Dateline:@#$% strips? It's like you've got a pre-made magazine. You'll have your second publication." That's pretty much what happened.

But then they were slow in getting the second Dateline:@#$% done. So, I've moved near Albany, New York and I'm shopping at FantaCo comic book store there. They talked about how they wanted to get into some publishing. I had the second magazine already done, and Eclipse wasn't getting around to it. I said, "Hey, do you mind if I do this with FantaCo?" They said, "Go right ahead." At the time I was naive to think they were happy with me leaving, but I don't know. Years later, when they had the history of Eclipse, somehow I was not involved.

SGMC: *How were you able to make the transition to DC Comics?*

Fred: Well, it was after I'd gotten the thing going in the Comic Buyers' Guide for a while and I'd had the first collection published by Eclipse with my name on the big title. I got a call one day, I believe from Barbara Zakin, but it could've been Mike Gold, Tony Tollin or Todd Kline. The four of them were thinking about Direct Currents. It was kind of like a newspaper, and a newspaper should have a comic strip. Who should do the comic strip? "Hey, there's this guy Fred Hembeck. I like his gags, Let's call him up and see if he wants to do it." And they called me up and I said, "Sure". I said, "Well, what should we call it?" They said, "I don't know—what do you want to call it? Let's use your name, it's kind of an unusual name." That's kind of how that all came about. It kept going until the DC Comics Implosion. They felt the need to add more pages to their comics, so the Direct Currents page was shoved over to the once a month "DC Dollar Comics", and then eventually that went away. So that was the end of my time at DC. It was fun while it lasted.

SGMC: *How did you break into Marvel?*

Fred: Jim Salicrup liked my stuff. He was working

on Marvel Age Magazine and he got me to do a strip. That was before the Fantastic Four Roast.

SGMC: *How did the Fantastic Four Roast come about?*

Fred: Jim Shooter, who I met at a convention a few months earlier remembered—but I'd forgotten this—that I had sent him an illustrated letter praising his work on the Avengers. I ran into him again at a Creation Convention, and he started talking with me and told me the plan he had going on, and that he was happy to see me. He said, "You know, we're going to be doing all kinds of different comics at Marvel under my tutelage and we may even do a Fred Hembeck Comic, and I'm thinking to myself. "Yeah. Like that's ever going to happen." But I'm smiling and everything. Years later, Jim posted that illustrated letter I wrote to him online and that's when I saw it, and thought, "Oh, no wonder he liked me and was so nice to me that day".

The 20th Anniversary of the Fantastic Four was coming up and he called me one day—this was a year or two after my initial meeting with him—and he said that he wanted to do this roast idea and had another writer in mind, but it didn't seem like what they were doing. He didn't have a feel for it and would I like to do it? Of course, I said, "Yes, sure I would," and so that's how that came about. Well, I'd just read recently that Marvel was putting together a hardcover, Marvel Masterworks: The Fantastic Four Vol. 21, the latest one with the John Byrne FF, and they included the Fantastic Four Roast. So, if I was permanently in the Marvel canon, so to speak, it's pretty cool. I mean, they could send me a free copy, which would be nice, too.

SGMC: *What made you want to Destroy the Marvel Universe?*

Fred: That was another thing that Jim called up and said "You know, there's this whole big thing going on in the Buyers Guide with Cat Yronwode saying that I'm going to destroy all the characters and it's going to be a mess. Why don't we do something that satirizes that? Jim Shooter Destroys the Marvel Universe?" Later, he called me back and said, "You know, I talked to the people, the business people, and they didn't like the idea of my name being in the title, so let's put your name in the title." And I'm thinking, "Well, no, I would be too modest for that." Of course, it didn't take much convincing for me to say. "OK. We'll do that." I got my name in the history books, so to speak.

SGMC: *You have done a lot of art with the Mighty Crusaders. When did you first discover the Mighty Crusaders?*

Fred: Before the Mighty Crusaders, there was the Fly. I discovered it after Superman comics, and before I even read a Marvel superhero comic I was buying the Archie Adventure series with the Fly and the Jaguar. The John Rosenberger era. I didn't see the Kirby stuff. I was always finding new superheroes, and one day The Fly became Fly-Man and John Rosenberger became Paul Reinman. I kept buying it, and then they started sneaking new heroes in, and it became the Mighty Crusaders. Now, you know, I love the idea. Going back to the Justice Society of America, the heroes of the 40s and Captain America. So, when they brought these characters back and said that they're from the Golden Age, I was really excited. There was

Fred Hembeck 2012 after John Rosenberger 1962

one of the books I enjoyed, especially that one issue called "Too Many Heroes". It had like 40 different characters—it was almost everybody they ever published in the 40s in one story. I like that stuff. Although, you know, to be honest, I was never a big fan of Paul Reinman's artwork, and the stories are kind of goofy, but I always liked the characters.

SGMC: *What did you think of their quirkiness of the Crusaders in the 60s?*

Fred: Well, at the time, it was a weird combination of Stan Lee's writing mixed with Batman TV show camp. A little of that goes a long way. But I read them. It was fun. I always like those kinds of quirky books, like Harvey's Thrill-O-Rama Comics and T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents—all that stuff to give me a little break from the usual Marvel and DC. If someone was wearing a costume, I was buying it.

SGMC: *You do a lot of comic cover recreations; how do you choose which covers to recreate?*

Fred: Well, of course, sometimes specific requests... well, not requests—people paid for it, not just requested it.

The first few of them, I would dig out something important to me that I enjoyed. The old Marvel stuff from the early 60s. That is why when I was doing the Buyer's Guide in the 90s, I would do two, three or four different covers that maybe had a theme. I would go down to my Staples store and I would reduce the covers and then I pasted them up and wrote a little something and turned it into a strip. Then I would sell each of the covers on eBay. So, it kind of worked out that way. But I should point out, I'm sick of doing covers. I'm not doing them any more. It's funny that you guys wrote to me about commissions, because I kind of put them aside a few months ago. I said to myself, "I have several, I still do, that are hanging over my head that I'm trying to get finished." I'm not going to take on any more for the time being, because I'd just rather finish up what I have. I'd like to just draw what I like to draw, put it up on eBay, and see what happens. So, that kind of works out for me. So, right now, I'm not taking on any commissions unless, you know, somebody says my daughter would like a Spider-Man card for her birthday. As opposed to someone who would want me to do 12 characters for Mortal Kombat all on a 9×12 drawing? No, I don't think I'll be doing that today. So, I'm done with that kind of stuff.

SGMC: *Are you still doing the sketch cards?*

Fred: Oh, I love the sketch cards. I love to *do* the sketch cards. I love to look for new stuff. Who knew that would become a thing? Someone suggested I do one, and I have been doing them ever since.

SGMC: *What do you charge for sketch cards?*

Fred: It varies depending on the character, but usually between $15 and $20 for a character. One guy ordered 50 of them and another ordered 25, that's the kind of thing that hangs over my head. So now I might do it, but only a few at a time.

SGMC: *What would you tell a young artist who wants to break into comics today?*

Fred: Don't do what I did. I don't know how I ever got into comics. People say, "Tell us how to get into comics." I'm saying, well, if you followed my route, good luck. It's very peculiar, and I wouldn't expect lightning to strike twice. But, I guess the thing to do is to keep drawing as much as you can, and try to get noticed. I mean, wow. I don't know if I could get noticed now with so many outlets online and stuff. But, back when I was doing what I was doing, there weren't that many of us. Just keep trying. That's all I can say.

Fred Hembeck 2006 after John Rosenberger 1962

Jay Piscopo talks about his comics & Golden Age heroes

by Rik Offenberger

I have known Jay Piscopo forever. I am not sure what project he was promoting when we first met, but we share a love of Golden Age Comics and the MLJ Heroes. Jay was nice enough to share his thoughts on his time in comics and the Mighty Crusaders with us.

Shield G-Man Club: *How old were you when you discovered comics?*

Jay Piscopo: I think I was around four. My uncle gave me some Skywald comics and my mother promptly, and justifiably, took them away a week later. They did make their mark, in lots of ways. While I admire the work as an adult—the experience helped me solidify the belief that kids should not be exposed to anything with horror or conflict before age six. By five, my dad took me to the barber—in the stack of magazines, were a stack of coverless Adam Strange comics. The story of Adam and Alannah and their adventures really took hold of my imagination and became the template for a lot of what I create and enjoy now. Regardless of market pressures, I do believe an "all-ages" or "general audience" approach, similar to the Silver Age of comics, is a good long game for creators.

SGMC: *When did you start drawing comics?*

Jay: Been drawing all my life. My first professional gig was the *Scrap City Pack Rats* for Goodwill Industries in the 90s

SGMC: *Where did you go to art school?*

Jay: Dropped out of the Museum School in Boston

SGMC: What was your first comic con portfolio review like?

Jay: Usually horrible, but I learned.

SGMC: *How did you develop your style?*

Jay: I do what I like and ignore what I don't, always improving, never settling.

SGMC: *What attracted you to self-publishing?*

Jay: Freedom, Sado-Masochism.

SGMC: *When did you discover the Mighty Crusaders?*

Jay: Loved the Shield and crew from Steranko's *History of Comics* in high school. An Archie digest comic with reprints really turned me on and made me delve deeper.

SGMC: What attracts you to the Crusaders?

Jay: Unused potential as an alternative to the other multiverses, like public domain characters in general.

SGMC: *Which is your favorite era of these characters?*

Jay: Hard to say. I love the Comet's arc, see what I did there? Golden Age Hangman, Silver Age Gray Morrow Black Hood, it varies.

SGMC: *How do you feel about the quirkiness of the 60s versus the traditional approach of the 80s?*

Jay: It had its place—love the art.

SGMC: *You have developed your own versions of the characters. How do you decide what to keep and what to change?*

Jay: Creativity with the obstacle of liability. Parody, pastiche, and homage are difficult lines to walk; it usually sums up to nostalgia and the fan will make the last decision. So, beyond being sued by the original trademark holder, I do whatever pleases me and see what sticks.

SGMC: *In your opinion, what are the elements needed for a good story?*

Jay: The stories I like to experience and tell usually will find opportunities to show the epic in the ordinary and the ordinary in the epic. As one example, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* works on this level and insists the viewer make up their own mind whether it is better to "print the legend". Any story that moves people to listen to their better angels and find hope is an accomplishment. In a lot of today's storytelling, I see the audience bringing these sentiments more than the filmmakers and mainstream comic creators. A good story must have a balance between all elements, otherwise, it becomes just a shrill vehicle for an agenda. The hard part is to give people what they want while proving it's what they need. Dickens could do that. As for my own needs, it's simple, like a pulp outline, exotic locales, unbelievable mystery weapon, seductive villains, heroic heroes and heroines, a few laughs, a lot of thrills and underlying message not to take crap from anybody unless you deserve it.

SGMC: *How have you incorporated the Crusaders into your work?*

Jay: I've put a couple in cameos. I've got a complete overhaul of the characters that I'd like to sneak in somewhere. Just started *Heroes Unleashed!* on Indyplanet—maybe there!

SGMC: *Where can fans find these comics?*

Jay: https://indyplanet.com/heroes-unleashed-1

SGMC: *You also do a variety of pieces for the uber-geeky fans like myself, from paper airplanes, digital prints, commissioned sketches and full color art. What can people get and how much does it cost?*

Jay: The best way is to PM me on Facebook—I can give rates and there's usually a sale going on.

SGMC: *What advice can you give a young artist just starting out who wants to break into comics?*

Jay: Don't. *Just Don't.* The competition is too fierce. Seriously and not so seriously, it's such a wide-open game now, with so many possibilities to get your work out there, so, just do it, to steal a phrase. When it comes to storytelling in general, I think it's always good to ask yourself hard questions. Why should my story exist? Do I possess the skills to tell it? How can I reach an audience?

SUPER-TEAM FAMILY
PRESENTS...
the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN AND THE FLY
60¢
NO. 257
JULY
YOU'VE GOT TO HELP ME, SPIDER-MAN! THE FATE OF THE CITY DEPENDS ON IT!
NO! I WILL NEVER TRUST A FLY! NEVER!

Super-Team Family: The Lost Issues: Ross Pearsall

Perhaps *the* most ambitious imaginary cover project going, though, is Ross Pearsall's *Super-Team Family: The Lost Issues* series, along with its predecessors based upon *Marvel Two-in-One* and DC's *The Brave and the Bold*. For these series, Ross has produced a new imaginary cover *every day* for nearly *ten years!* STF itself includes over 2800 issues.

Ross creates each of these by cutting and pasting characters and other elements from real covers, comic book interiors, comic strips and other sources. Some of his creations have taken on a life of their own. He has, for instance, done 22 covers documenting the romance between Wonder Woman and Captain America, and seven featuring the "Danvers Twins"—Carol and Kara.

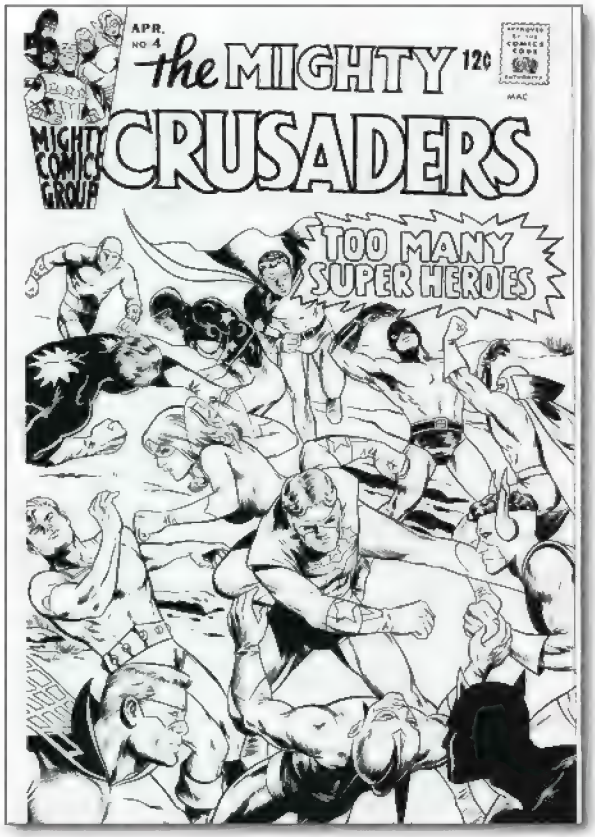
To date, Ross has produced 14 covers featuring Archie Comics characters, including—of course—Spider-Man and the Fly, seen here. It should come as no surprise that after ten years of daily posts, Ross's work has gotten to be really excellent, and at times, just a little bit strange (Calvin and Hobbes on Hoth?).

Reinterpretations: Mike Dunne

Mike Dunne has taken an interesting approach. One of his many commission projects consists of having different artists do reinterpretations of Mighty Crusaders #4, the infamous "Too Many Super Heroes" issue. So far, he has *not* produced too many too manys.

In addition to the John Watson pen and ink version shown here, his collection includes versions by artists such as George Tuska, Bob Layton and several others. Some are fully realized covers, and others are the bare artwork without all the dressing. Most are black and white, but one by Tom Ziuko was colored and appeared as the cover on Alter Ego #96.

The *Reinterpretations* aren't by any means Mike's only collection, nor the only MLJ/Mighty Crusaders in his vast collection. He has acquired a great many commissioned pieces, convention sketches and original art. His galleries on ComicArtFans are very much worth browsing through. Just allow yourself enough time, because the guy has got a **lot** of very cool stuff.



Investigating Nate Contini

by Rik Offenberger

Nate Contini and his brother are working on a very special Mighty Crusaders project that we will mention at the end of this interview. He is clearly a huge fan of the Crusaders and he was nice enough to share his backstory and art with us.

***Shield G-Man Club**: When did you discover comics?*

Nate Contini: My father was an avid reader of comics. He grew up reading the original Marvel stuff, as well as the Silver Age DC books. He sorta encoded his love of comics on myself and my brothers.

***SGMC**: Were your parents supportive of your reading comics?*

Nate: Oh extremely so. In fact, I practically learned to read from Green Lantern comics my Dad gave me.

***SGMC**: Which comics were your favorites?*

Nate: When I was younger, I was drawn to over-personified heroes, so characters like Captain America, Spider-Man, Shield, Flash, I couldn't get enough of them. As I've gotten older, I have gotten into more darker toned comics. Currently, my favorite titles are Marvel Comics Daredevil, and Image Comics Die.

***SGMC**: When did you start drawing comic characters?*

Nate: I honestly cannot remember a time I didn't draw superheroes. Ever since I could hold a pencil, those colorful characters graced my pages. In fact, my mother received a letter from one of my teachers, telling her how I paid no attention in class and instead sat and drew the entire time.

***SGMC**: Where did you study art?*

Nate: My father taught me the basics, teaching me to draw with his very Kirby-esque art style. I also took art classes in high school, as well as a few in college. I even tried the Joe Kubert School's correspondence course. Had I been more mature at the time I would have stuck with that better. A lot of my fine-tuning, though, was done on my own, but it would not have gone nearly as well if I didn't have the foundation I had.

***SGMC**: When did you discover the Mighty Crusaders?*

Nate: My first encounter with the MLJ heroes was when my brother Jason started getting the Impact books. I would immediately grab his copy after he finished it and read it. After that my father introduced me to the earlier stuff.

***SGMC**: What attracted you to them?*

Nate: I think the thing that made me most interested in them was the fact that they were not Marvel or DC. Well at least at the time I didn't realize Impact was DC.

***SGMC**: Who is your favorite MLJ character?*

Nate: This is a tougher question, but I would have to say, Shield, followed closely by Fly, or Fly-Man if you will, Comet, and Black Hood.

***SGMC**: What do you think has made them*

so enduring that they have been published for 80 years?

Nate: If I had to take a guess, I would say it's the history and the tropes they started. From Shield being the first patriotic hero to Comet being the first to die and resurrect, in comics.

***SGMC**: When did you start doing your interpretations of the MLJ Covers?*

Nate: That didn't actually start until last December. I did it on a whim for a Christmas present for my brother Jason Contini.

***SGMC**: What is your process?*

Nate: My goal is to try and make it look like those propaganda posters you would see during, say, WW2. Well, what I do first is I essentially block out all the base colors. On the Pep 1 I did, for example, I laid out and filled all the red section in one shade of red. Then I went back and added 2 layers above that. One for shades, for which I use a darker color; and one for highlights. They are decided by where I think the light is coming from. Then I use what is called the Lasso tool in Photoshop, marquee out the section I want colored, and fill it in. When finished it looks like it's a complicated process, but in my opinion, it's relatively simple.

***SGMC**: When you look at the older covers, what do you try to recapture?*

Nate: I like to try and do the classic covers, from the MLJ and original Archie era. Those have large blocks of a solid color at the top of the page, which makes the image have that propaganda poster look. I have been trying to do one with Impact's Legend of Shield #1, but it's not looking as good, and I may just scrap it in the end.

***SGMC**: What else are you doing with the Mighty Crusaders?*

Nate: Well, currently I'm a Producer and Costume/Art Designer for Jason Contini's fan film Red Circle Investigations. This has been a dream project of his, and I'd be lying if I said I didn't want to do one as well. Essentially, though, I am helping Jason with ideas for the story, if he wants those ideas, and I designed all the costumes the heroes will be clad in. Also, Jason and I are planning something else MLJ-related. It's too early to give details on that now, but I thought I'd drop a little tease here.

RED CIRCLE INVESTIGATIONS
A MIGHTY CRUSADERS FAN FILM

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12¢
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GET HIM! KILL FLY-MAN!
OUT-NUMBERED! AND MY SUPER-POWERS ARE GONE!
HERE'S ONE PAL YOU CAN COUNT ON FLY-MAN THE COMET!!
AND MOST OF ALL FLY MAN, HERE'S YOUR BUDDY BLACK HOOD! YA-HOOO!
HERE'S ANOTHER THE SHIELD!!

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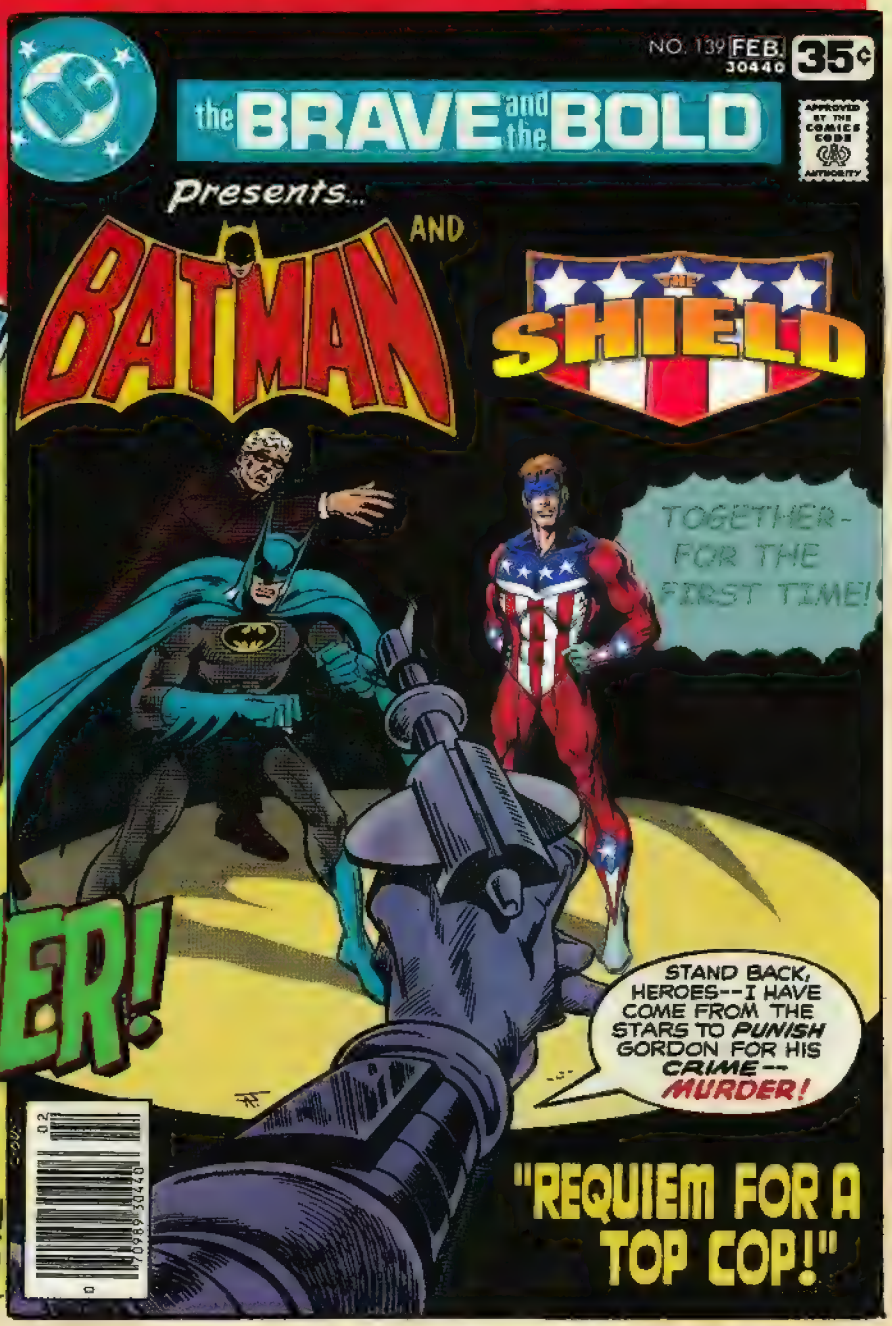
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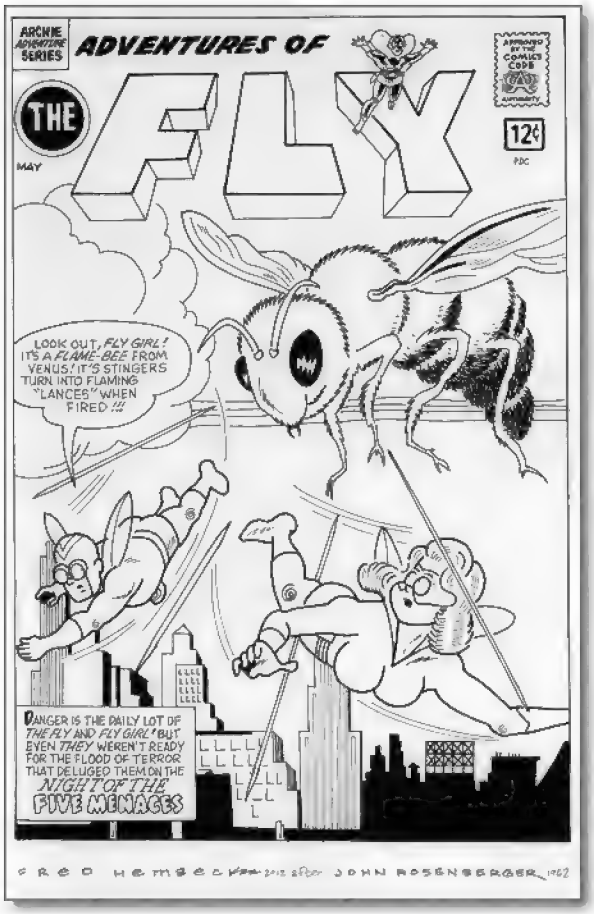
ARCHIE ADVENTURE SERIES
ADVENTURES OF
THE FLY
MAY
12¢
LOOK OUT, FLY GIRL! IT'S A FLAME-BEE FROM VENUS! IT'S STINGERS TURN INTO FLAMING "LANCES" WHEN FIRED!!!
DANGER IS THE DAILY LOT OF THE FLY AND FLY GIRL! BUT EVEN THEY WEREN'T READY FOR THE FLOOD OF TERROR THAT DELUGED THEM ON THE NIGHT OF THE FIVE MENACES
FRED HEMBECK

Fred Hembeck

Fred Hembeck is a cartoonist who has done as much or more than any artist to keep the *comic* in comic books. Since *Dateline:Spider-Man* appeared as his very first *Dateline:@#$%* strip in the Comic Book Buyers Guide back in 1977, Fred has kept us laughing. One of the ways he has done this has been to recast classic covers in ways that are humorous, while still honoring the original artists.

Fred has created hundreds of such covers. More than seventy of them can be found in the galleries on hembeck.com. A couple can also be found in his gallery on the Mighty Crusaders Network. From the very start, with his send-up of Jimmy Olsen #88, Fred's covers featured the same layout and dialog as the originals but redos of the characters in his own style, and thereon hangs both the humor and the homage of the series.

ARCHIE ADVENTURE SERIES
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THE FLY
MAY
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LOOK OUT, FLY GIRL! IT'S A FLAME-BEE FROM VENUS! IT'S STINGERS TURN INTO FLAMING "LANCES" WHEN FIRED!!!
DANGER IS THE DAILY LOT OF THE FLY AND FLY GIRL! BUT EVEN THEY WEREN'T READY FOR THE FLOOD OF TERROR THAT DELUGED THEM ON THE NIGHT OF THE FIVE MENACES

Mike Cody

Mike Cody is another artist who produces imaginary covers featuring the MLJ/Archie ultra-heroes, though he doesn't publish them as a named project. His work can be found in his gallery on the Mighty Crusaders Network's web site. I am particularly fond of this piece pitting the Shield against a giant robot. It is evocative of both the original Pep Comics #1 and the *Iron Giant* animated feature, but he has several others that are excellent, especially some of his pencil work. Check it out.

Gregg Whitmore

Like Ross Pearsall, Gregg Whitmore creates his covers by carving up and reassembling existing works. He does so with a skill and deftness that can be extremely convincing. Remember the time that Spider-Man confronted the Fly? Or was it the Human Fly?

Given that they both descend from Kirby's Silver Spider, cross-overs between the Fly and Spider-Man are an obvious subject for mock covers—witness Ross's cover earlier in this article. What stands out in Gregg's version of that encounter is both the technical skill with which he did it and his choice of original art. Come across his mock Spider-Man annual out of context, and "Yeah, I remember that!" is a completely understandable reaction. More of his work can be seen in his Mighty Crusaders Network gallery.

Kent Clark

CAPTAIN AMERICA
45 thrilling pages of CAPTAIN AMERICA PLUS OTHER GREAT FEATURES!
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SMASHING THRU: CAPTAIN AMERICA CAME FACE TO FACE WITH HITLER --
ALSO CAPTAIN AMERICA'S YOUNG ALLY, BUCKY

Our next artist is Kent Clark, mild mannered reporter… No, that's the other guy. Despite the appearance, "Kent Clark" is not a pseudonymous secret identity. It's the real name of a talented fan artist.

We all know that Captain America got into trouble for being too similar to his predecessor, the Shield, but just how much was copied?

Check out his gallery on the Mighty Crusaders Network.

CGC UNIVERSAL GRADE
4.1
Shield #1
MLJ Comics, 1/41
OFF-WHIT Pages
Harry Shorten story
Irv Novick art
Kent Clark cover
2018O119
Origin and 1st appearance of The Shield and Dusty. Hitler cover.
CGC
THE SHIELD
45 thrilling pages of THE SHIELD PLUS OTHER GREAT FEATURES!
MARCH NO.1 COMICS
SMASHING THRU: THE SHIELD CAME FACE TO FACE WITH HITLER --
ALSO THE SHIELD'S YOUNG ALLY DUSTY

Leonard Morgan

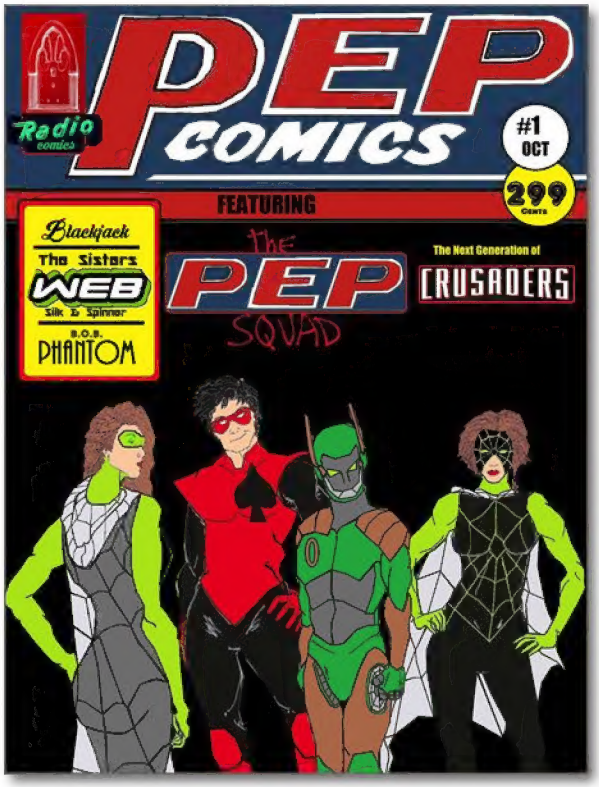
Leonard Morgan is another artist whose gallery on the Mighty Crusaders Network's web site contains a number of excellent imaginary covers. His gallery features reimagined versions of the classic characters, some very reminiscent of the original design and others all his own. All of them offer an interesting perspective for our old friends, the MLJ/Mighty Crusader characters. His Comet really shows off his ability to evoke the original Golden Age Character, and at the same time update him to a much more modern look.

WINTER ISSUE
NO.3
MIGHTY CRUSADERS
Comics
featuring
THE SHIELD ~ THE BLACK HOOD
~ THE COMET ~ MISTER JUSTICE ~ THE WEB ~
THE FLY ~ THE JAGUAR ~ FLY GIRL,
AND BLACK JACK in brand new
episodes as personally related at the
first meeting of the Mighty Crusaders
Alex Wright

Alex Wright

Alex Wright is an artist who is particularly known for his *photomorphs*—manipulating photos to transform the subject into a superhero. Most of his photomorphs are individual portraits, but he has done a few mock covers, and even a real cover for Alter Ego.

Over the years, a number of his works have featured MLJ characters, many of which can be seen in a set of yearly galleries of his work on the Mighty Crusaders Network covering 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2008.



Reimagineered Comics: Anthony Conn

Comic book historian/enthusiast and pop culture essayist Anthony Wayne Conn is another fan artist featured on the Mighty Crusaders Network. His specialty is updating the characters' design to the modern era, as can be seen on his Reimagineer gallery. Again, much of his work is individual character portraits, but he's built a number of covers featuring them as well.

Jay Piscopo

Indy comic creator Jay Piscopo, whose portraits of the Shield grace both this issue and #2, is a long time fan of Golden and Silver Age heroes. He has done a number of portraits of the Mighty Crusaders characters and a couple of mock covers, which can be seen on his Mighty Crusaders Network gallery.

Real covers and real indy comics are more what Jay is known for, from Scrap City Pack Rats, done in collaboration with Goodwill Industries, to the several 'zines on IndyPlanet that you can find alongside this fanzine, Jay's love of comics, pulps and kid-friendly entertainment has stood out for nearly three decades.

Comics by Jay Piscopo
available from IndyPlanet

RED CIRCLE INVESTIGATIONS
A MIGHTY CRUSADERS FAN FILM

Nate Contini

Nate, another indy comic and film creator, has recently started doing very cool recreations of classic MLJ/Mighty Crusaders covers, such as Pep#1 and Fly Man #31, and posting them to the Shield G-Man Club Facebook page as works in progress. His work has a style that is on the one hand nostalgic, harkening back to the posters of the mid-twentieth century, and on the other very contemporary in his use of digital layering.

Nate, along with his brother Jason, is also working on *Red Circle Investigations*, Archlight Studio's forthcoming Mighty Crusaders fan film. Nate is the producer and designer, with Jason directing. We'll be covering the Red Circle Investigations more in depth in future issues of this 'zine.

Secret Origins with Rik Offenberger

by Jim Burrows

It's fun to be able to turn the tables on Rik, making him the subject instead of the interviewer. I met Rik through the Shield G-Man Club group, and was immediately impressed by his generosity and that of the community that he has built. Recreating the Shield fan club, and giving us all the opportunity to be badge- and card-carrying members was wonderful. It's something that we all need more of these days: giving joy for the sake of joy.

The next thing that I learned about Rik was the depth of his knowledge of the material. I'd seen ads for the MLJ Companion, but somehow had managed to avoid acquiring it. I remedied that and was again impressed. Exploring 1st Comics News and the Mighty Crusaders Network not only demonstrated that his knowledge of the material matched his generosity. It also revealed another thing about him: he thrives on collaboration and inspires it. How could I not join in?

***Shield G-Man Club**: Who introduced you to comics?*

Rik Offenberger: That would be my father. He read comics in the 40s and when he got a bad grade, his mother threw them out. When I was little, he would buy comics for me and read them to me as bedtime stories. When I was older, he would take me to Sunday school and on the way home we would stop at 7-11 and he would buy me a Slurpee and a comic book.

***SGMC**: How did he influence your taste in comics?*

Rik: He liked superhero comics and that is what I still like today.

***SGMC**: Were you involved with fandom as a youngster?*

Rik: It all depends on what you mean by involved. I went to the San Diego Comic-Con in 1986 before it was as big as it is today, but I was never a member of a club. I purchased comics by mail from ads in other comics, but by the time I discovered fanzines I was an adult.

***SGMC**: Were you always a Crusaders fan, or did you start out favoring another company?*

Rik: One of the problems with buying comics at a 7-11 was that they didn't get every issue and they didn't know or care. So, I favored DC Comics because each issue was self-contained and I couldn't get a complete Marvel story arc as a 7-year-old. I had seen old copies of Mighty Comics in a used book store and a copy of the Jaguar in a public library, but it wasn't much exposure. My father purchased copies of the Dynapubs Flashback Reprints of Pep Comics, but I didn't understand the difference between the different publishers at the time. I didn't "discover" the Crusaders until the 80s and I have been a fan ever since.

***SGMC**: What makes the Crusaders stand out for you?*

Rik: I had a fascination with the Lancelot Strong covers I had seen in the Overstreet Price Guide. When Mighty Crusaders #1 hit the stands, I saw Joe Higgins and